SEVEN SERMONS

UPON THE

Following Subjects;

VIZ.

The Difference betwixt Truth and Falſhood, Right and Wrong.
The natural Abilities of Men for diſcerning theſe Differences.
The Right and Duty of private Judgment.
Objections conſidered.
The Love of God.
The Love of our Neighbour.
The firſt and great Command-ment, &c.

Preached

At a LECTURE in the Weſt Meeting-Houſe
In BOSTON,

Begun the firſt Thurſday in *June*, and ended the laſt Thurſday In *Auguſt*, 1748.

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BOSTON, N. E.
Printed and Sold by ROGERS and FOWLE in Queen-ſtreet.

MDCCXLIX.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

To The

CHRISTIAN Society

Uſually worſhipping in the *Weſt Meeting-Houſe* in *Boſton*,

THESE SERMONS, at firſt preached, and now publiſhed, at their Requeſt, are humbly inſcribed, in Acknowledgment of their Kindneſs and Generoſity to

The AUTHOR.

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The principal *Errata* of the Preſs, are as follows,

PAGE 16, line 1, for ne, read no. P. 26, l. 10, for in, read is. P. 47, l. 18, inſert the particle *a*, before third. P. 98, l. 7, from the bottom, dele do with, after to. P. 137, l. 8, for he, read they. P. 150, l. 17, from the bottom, read natural and moral. P. 152, l. 19, read ſpeculative belief. P. 155, l. 10, read the fables. P. 157, l. 2, and l. 7, from the bottom, for *wilds*, read *winds*.

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THE

Difference betwixt Truth and Falſhood, Right and Wrong.

SERMON I.

LUKE XII. 54——57.

And he ſaid alſo to the people, When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, There cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is.

And when ye ſee the ſouth wind blow, ye ſay, There will be heat; and it cometh to paſs.

Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth: but how is it, that ye do not diſcern this time?

Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?

THESE are the words of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt: and the occaſion of them ſeems to have been as follows— He had been preaching the goſpel in *Jeruſalem*, and the neighbouring cities of the *Jews*; and had, by the purity of his doctrine, the holineſs of his life, together with the nature and number of his miracles, convinced many perſons, that he was the *Meſſiah that was to come*,

and that they were not to *look for another.* However the chief of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* rejected him as an impoſtor, attributing his miraculous works to the power of *magic*, or his ſuppoſed familiarity with *evil ſpirits.*

Now it is eaſy to ſee what an influence this conduct of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* in vilifying our bleſſed Saviour, muſt unavoidably have upon the generality of the people. For they were in the higheſt eſteem amongſt the *Jews*, both becauſe they were ſuppoſed to have the deepeſt inſight into things of a religious nature, and, at the ſame time, to be men of extraordinary piety. This favourable opinion concerning them, was indeed ill-grounded. But they had the talent of impoſing upon the people, in great perfection; and, in fact, managed matters with ſo much craft and ſubtilty, that they were thought almoſt the only ſaints in the world, and the great oracles to be conſulted upon all occaſions. The people placed an implicit faith in their dogma's and deciſions. Nothing was thought to bear the genuine ſtamp of truth, unleſs they had had the coining of it: And their cenſure of any particular perſon, or doctrine, was ſufficient to make either of them odious to the multitude.

When, therefore, theſe infalliable guides ſtigmatized our Lord as an ill man; when they reproached him as one, who, without any reaſon or authority, was attempting to diſcredit certain opinions which they had *received to have and to hold from their fore-fathers*; when they accuſed him of making innovations in the old eſtabliſhed religion, to the great hazard of the ſouls of men; I ſay, when they talked and railed in this *pious ſtrain*, it gave a general alarm to the people, eſpecially to the *ſuperſtitious vulgar*; and expoſed our Lord to their contempt and hatred and inſults. They gave themſelves no farther trouble to inquire into the grounds of his pretenſions to the *meſſiah-ſhip*; concluding that *he* muſt needs be a deceiver,

deceiver, who was condemned by ſuch a learned and holy body of men, as that of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*.

FEW of them condeſcended ſo far as to come and hear him preach, (this being repreſented to them as dangerous) that ſo they might know what he had to ſay for himſelf: and thoſe that did, came rather as ſpies, that they might find occaſion to cavil, and to accuſe him to the *Prieſts* and *Phariſees*, than with ſuch an unprejudiced and candid diſpoſition as became inquirers after the truth.

BUT although the generality of the *Jews* were ſuch abject ſlaves to the dictates of their ſpiritual inſtructors, never daring to heſitate concerning the truth of what they aſſerted upon religious ſubjects, but receiving every thing, how abſurd ſoever, with all the humility of implicit faith; yet it ſeems, that in their *temporal* and *worldly* concerns, they were cautious enough. Here they were not fond of taking up ſatisfied with any man's word; but were forward to think, inquire and judge for themſelves.

THIS is a ſhort character of the people to whom our Lord ſpeaks in the text. And this being kept in view, his addreſs will appear very natural and ſeaſonable. — *And he ſaid alſo to the people, When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, There cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is. And when ye ſee the ſouth-wind blow, ye ſay there will be heat; and it cometh to paſs. Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth: but how is it, that ye do not diſcern this time? Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?*

THESE Words ſeem to be very plain of themſelves: but the ſenſe of them may be expreſſed more at large in the following paraphraſe, —

"AND

" And after theſe things, *Jeſus* addreſſed himſelf to " the *Jews*, who were generally prejudiced againſt him, " thro' their blind attachment to their ſpiritual guides; " and ſaid — Ye that ſuffer yourſelves to be led blind- " fold by others, with regard to me and my doctrine, " and things of a religious concern in general, are never- " theleſs ſagacious enough in matters of equal difficulty, " and much leſs importance — Ye are apt and ſkilful " enough at diſtinguiſhing the ſigns and tokens of " things that are to come to paſs in the natural world, " in which your preſent intereſt is concerned. † Ye " can, (for example) by obſerving the colour of the " ſky, and the blowing of the wind, form a true judg- " ment concerning the future change of the weather. " How comes it to paſs, then, ye deluded hypocrites, " that amidſt all your ſagacity in things that relate to " the preſent world, ye are ſtill blind and undiſcerning " in things of a religious nature? why do not ye that " can preſage various changes from the appearance of " the earth and heavens, diſcern alſo the periods and " revolutions of things; the various diſpenſations of " providence in the moral world? In particular, how " comes it to paſs that ye do not diſtinguiſh the preſent " ſeaſon, in which God is erecting a new diſpenſation, " to ſucceed that of *Moſes*? There are ſigns and tokens " enough to convince you that ſuch a revolution is now " taking place, if ye would but examine them atten- " tively. Why, then, will ye ſuffer yourſelves to be " blinded by the authority of the *Prieſts* and *Phariſees*, " when God has given you ſufficient abilities to gain the " knowledge of the truth? Why will ye not exert your " own faculties, and judge for yourſelves what is true " and right in this matter, as ye do in things of a " worldly nature? "

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† See Dr. *Clarke's* paraphraſe.

THUS I have endeavoured to give a true idea of the original ſcope and meaning of the words which I have choſen for the ſubject of my preſent diſcourſe. I ſhall now wave every thing in them peculiar to the time and circumſtances wherein they were ſpoken; and obſerve from them ſeveral univerſal truths which concern all times and perſons and places alike.

As

I. THAT there is a natural difference betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong.

II. THAT men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for the diſcerning of theſe differences.

III. *and laſtly*, THAT men are under obligation to exert theſe faculties; and to judge for themſelves in things of a religious concern.

I. THEN, there is a natural difference betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong. — *Why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is* right?

BY *what is right*, it is probable that our Saviour here more immediately intends, what is *true*; for his diſcourſe in this place turns upon *examining*, *judging*, and *inferring* one thing from another. But whether by this term we underſtand, what is *true in theory*, or what is *right in practice*, it will come to much the ſame thing at laſt; for there is an inſeparable connexion betwixt them. If certain things are *true* in ſpeculation, there muſt be ſome correſpondent *fitneſs* of actions reſulting therefrom. And, on the other hand, if any thing be allowed *fit* in a practical ſenſe, that *fitneſs* or *rightneſs* muſt be founded in certain *truths* and *relations* before ſubſiſting. I ſhall, therefore, take it for granted, that the text ſuppoſes, That there is in nature both a *True*, as diſtinguiſhed from ſpeculative *Error*; and a *Right*, as diſtinguiſhed from

Wrong

Wrong in *Conduct.* And the remainder of this diſcourſe will be taken up with theſe important diſtinctions.

INDEED the ſpending of time to prove that there are really ſuch differences as thoſe mentioned, may appear to ſome to be rather childiſh impertinence, or formal trifling, than a proper employment for reaſonable Creatures, it being ſuch a plain and obvious truth. However it is to be remembered, that no notion is too abſurd to deſerve to be refuted, while ſome are abſurd enough to propagate, and others to believe, it: eſpecially if it be ſuch an one as ſtrikes at the root of all religion, and every thing wherein the happineſs of mankind conſiſts.

AND ſuch is the notion of an abſolute indifference in nature with relation to truth and falſhood, right and wrong. For this being allowed, it follows that we have no invariable rule of life and conduct. No man, upon this ſuppoſition is under a poſſibility either of judging or acting *amiſs*; or of the contrary. Each man *thinks* as juſtly as another, how contrary ſoever his ſentiments are: And ſo alſo each one *acts* as rightly as any other, let him act how he will. This is to make ſhort work with all queſtions and debates concerning truth, religion, and the rule of human conduct: it ſuperſedes all inquiries about them, by preſuppoſing that they have no exiſtence but in the idea of certain doting men who have employed themſelves in inventing arbitrary diſtinctions.

THERE ſeem to have been two *ſpecies* of *Scepticks* in the World: one of which exploded the whole notion of truth and right, as oppoſed to falſhood and wrong conduct: and another which ſeemingly allowed ſuch differences to have an exiſtence in nature; but held it impoſſible for *us* to *diſcern* them. It is only the firſt of theſe opinions that we are concerned with at preſent; the latter will be conſidered in our next diſcourſe.

To

To begin with *truth*—Notwithſtanding what ſome are pleaſed to pronounce with their lips concerning the indifference of truth and falſhood, it is hardly poſſible but that their hearts ſhould be at variance with their mouths, and give them the *lie*, even while they are denying there is any ſuch thing as *falſhood*. For if there be any thing *exiſting*, (which ſurely no body was ever ſo abſurd as to deny) there muſt neceſſarily be ſuch a thing as truth ; truth, as abſtracted from mind or intelligence, being nothing diſtinct from the real nature and properties of things exiſting. Whatever exiſts, has a real exiſtence ; and if ſo, it cannot be true that it has no exiſtence. Whatever has a being, muſt alſo exiſt in *ſome certain, determinate manner* ; with ſuch and ſuch properties, affections and attributes ; with ſuch and ſuch proportions, aſpects and relations. And we can as little alter *theſe* by our opinions, as we can cauſe the things themſelves to exiſt and not exiſt, alternately, as our thoughts vary concerning them. Thus truth is ſomewhat determinate in itſelf ; it exiſts indpendently of our notions concerning it : And the preciſe boundaries betwixt *that*, and *falſhood*, are alſo determined by the real nature and properties of things, whether they are perceptible to us, or not.

Truth, as it exiſts in the *mind*, is nothing but the perception or knowledge of that independent truth now mentioned ; or a knowledge of things as they really exiſt. And as it relates to *words* and *propoſitions*, it is nothing but the *right* uſe of certain arbitrary ſigns, having a meaning annexed to them by common conſent ; i. e. the uſing them in ſuch a manner that they ſhall be conformable to, and expreſſive of, the real nature and properties of the thing treated of.

To return — Can any man think it equally true that he does, and that he does not, exiſt? I inſtance in this, becauſe it is familiar ; but the ſame queſtion may be aſked

aſked concerning every thing elſe. This is an univerſal dilemma, applicable to every thing that comes under conſideration — "It is, or it is not." No middle way can be taken. This is indeed no new diſcovery: it is ſelf-evident, and a firſt principle.

THUS, that we either do, or do not, converſe with ſenſible objects, ſo that one may be truly affirmed, and the other denied, is as plain as it is, that we either do, or do not exiſt. We may proceed in the ſame manner to conſider things, which, if they exiſt at all, lie beyond the reach of our animal ſenſes. It is as certain in itſelf, that there are, or that there are not, ſpiritual and inviſible agents, as it is that there are, or are not ſenſible objects. And with relation to the being of a GOD, it is as plain, that there is, or that there is not, ſuch a *Being*, as that there are, or are not, inviſible agents in general.

WE may deſcend in the ſame way to all the particular queſtions that have ariſen concerning the particular nature of this *Being*, upon ſuppoſition he exiſts — concerning the nature of his government — concerning the reality of a revelation from him — concerning the immortality of our ſouls, &c. There muſt neceſſarily be a *true* and a *falſe*, with relation to every queſtion that can be propoſed, or come into our minds. We cannot ſo much as doubt of the truth of any particular propoſition, without ſuppoſing that truth lies on one ſide or the other.

IT will be obſerved that I have not attempted to determine any of the above-mentioned queſtions. This was beyond my preſent deſign. All I aim at, is to ſhow, that there is, and muſt be, a natural diſtinction betwixt truth and error, in *general*; a diſtinction which does not depend upon the precarious humours and opinions of men: Whatever judgment we may form in any particular caſe,

caſe, it no ways affects the truth of it. Truth ſtill remains the ſame ſimple, uniform, conſiſtent thing, amidſt all the various and contrary opinions of mankind concerning it.

The natural diſtinction betwixt truth and falſhood being exploded, ſuch paradoxes as theſe muſt follow — That no man's opinions are either *right* or *wrong* — That however contrary the ſentiments of different men are to one another, they are both equally conformable to the nature and reality of the things they judge upon — That there are neither any knowing nor any fooliſh men in the world — That what we uſually call wiſdom and folly, are the ſame — And, what is ſtranger than all, That theſe paradoxes are neither true nor falſe —

If there be any ſuch thing as wiſdom, as oppoſed to ignorance and folly, it conſiſts in knowing the truth; and a man is wiſe in the ſame degree that he does ſo. There is no knowledge, but of ſome truth or fact: Or, in other words, knowledge preſuppoſes the being of truth, or ſomething to be known. Now if there be no ſuch thing as truth, there is nothing to be known: and conſequently every man, yea, every being whatever, muſt be intirely ignorant and deſtitute of knowledge; as deſtitute of it, not only as *the horſe and mule which have no underſtanding*, but as any part of ſenſeleſs inanimate matter. So that notwithſtanding all the noiſe there has been in the world about wiſdom and folly; notwithſtanding the univerſal applauſe that has been beſtowed on ſome perſons, as gloriouſly diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of mankind by a happy *genius* and peculiar *ſagacity*; yet in reality all this is at bottom nothing but empty words without any meaning at all. *Socrates* and *Plato*, *Locke* and *Newton*, were not ſuperiour, in point of wiſdom, to the moſt illiterate huſband-man. Nay; upon this ſuppoſition, even *Pyrrho* and *Arceſilaus* themſelves, the great leaders of the *ſceptic* tribe, knew no more than thoſe

whom they upbraided with their ignorance. This, indeed, is a conſequence which the *Pyrrhoniſts* will hardly be perſwaded to own. For there are none more apt than they, to value themſelves upon their ſuperiour wiſdom and penetration. And they pleaſe themſelves in particular with the thought of their being the diſcoverers of this mighty *arcanum*, that there is no ſuch thing as truth, as diſtinguiſhed from error. But if there be no ſuch thing as truth, why will they pleaſe themſelves for their ſagacity in making this diſcovery? Or why will they endeavour to bring others over to their opinion, when by their firſt, and I might add, their only, principle, thoſe *others* are no more in an error than themſelves. Such is the perplexity, the endleſs labyrinth, that a man brings himſelf into, by aſſerting for truth, that there is no ſuch thing as truth.

We are indeed left intirely in the dark with reſpect to many things; our knowledge is, at beſt, but of ſmall extent; and the opinions of men are various. It is this that has given ſome men occaſion to confound truth and error, as though there were in nature no difference betwixt them. But I hope it is needleſs to ſay any thing more in oppoſition to an opinion ſo directly contrary to common ſenſe.

I proceed now to the other diſtinction mentioned above; the diſtinction betwixt *right* and *wrong* in *conduct*. And, as it was before obſerved, ſuch a diſtinction muſt neceſſarily take place in conſequence of the former. There are, perhaps, ſome things ſo indifferent as no ways to affect practice, whether they are true or falſe. But there are other principles which, being allowed true, immediately induce upon us an obligation to act in a *particular, determinate manner*; ſo that to act thus ſhall be *right* and *reaſonable*; and to do the contrary *unfit* and *wrong*.

THUS, for example, it being ſuppoſed, That there is ſome particular courſe or method of acting, which tends to promote our happineſs upon the whole; and that a contrary conduct tends to our miſery, (which by the way are not bare ſuppoſitions, but plain facts) a fitneſs of the former courſe of action, in oppoſition to the latter, neceſſarily follows. For happineſs being in itſelf a *good*, and miſery an *evil*, it is in itſelf right and reaſonable to purſue the former, and to avoid the latter. If to this we add, (which experience ſhows to be fact alſo) that the ſame courſe of action which tends to *private* happineſs, tends to *publick* alſo, this lays us under a twofold obligation to take that courſe. For it is in itſelf right to do good to others, as well as to ourſelves, happineſs being as valuable to them as it is to us. From this general principle our obligation to what is uſually called moral and ſocial virtue; to fidelity, juſtice, charity; to humility and temperance, may be eaſily inferred. For it is apparent, from experience, that by the ſteady, uniform practice of theſe virtues, both the good of individuals, and of the publick, is promoted. Indeed it ſeems impoſſible but that ſuch a practice as tends to the good of one, ſhould tend to the good of the other alſo. For publick happineſs is nothing but the happineſs of a *number* of *individuals* united in ſociety: So that if the individuals of which the ſociety conſiſts, be happy, the community muſt neceſſarily be happy alſo. And on the other hand, the *community* is rendered miſerable in the ſame degree that *individuals* are ſo. Virtue, then, is what we are under obligation to practiſe, without the conſideration of the being of a God, or of a future ſtate, barely from its apparent tendency to make mankind happy at preſent.

AGAIN, let us ſuppoſe, (what is at leaſt ſuppoſeable) That there is a God; a being who created, and who governs the world, in infinite wiſdom and goodneſs: i. e. in ſuch a manner as to communicate the greateſt poſſible happineſs,

happineſs to his creatures conſidered collectively. — This being is plainly the object of eſteem, gratitude, love, reverence, truſt, &c. to all his rational creatures. His character is in itſelf amiable and perfect. To treat him with contempt, or diſregard, is to treat him as being what he *is not*; which certainly cannot be *right*. *Piety*, therefore, is what we are under obligation to, upon ſuppoſition there is any ſuch being as this, exiſting.

But farther — If there be ſuch a being, he is *perfect* in all moral excellence, and therefore we, and all other intelligent beings, are under obligation to copy after, and imitate, him, according to the condition and capacity of our natures, without the conſideration of his enjoining it upon us by any expreſs and poſitive law. For ſo far as we fall ſhort of him, we fall ſhort of perfection, according to the ſuppoſition, he being the rule and ſtandard of perfection. And ſo, on the other hand, we are perfect, inproportion as we reſemble him in the temper of our minds; and imitate him in the conduct of our lives. And this brings us in another way, to the former concluſion, *viz.* That we are under obligation to practiſe what is uſually called moral virtue; for by this we imitate God: and fall in with his benevolent deſign in creating and governing the world.

Again — It follows upon the ſuppoſition of ſuch a being, That his declared will ought to be univerſally the rule of our actions, in whatever manner it is made known to us, whether by natural *reaſon*, or ſupernatural *revelation*; and whether we are able to ſee the reaſon and grounds of his injunctions, or not. For, properly ſpeaking, our obligation to obey the commands of ſuch a being as knows and wills always what is beſt, does not ariſe in any degree from the particular *manner* in which we come to the knowledge of his commands; or from our ſeeing the grounds of them: but ſolely from our knowing that they are *in fact* his commands: Thus if this

this being has, commanded us, beſides practiſing ſuch moral virtues as thoſe mentioned above, to do certain things not dictated by the light of nature; if he has commanded us to ſubmit ourſelves to *Jeſus* of *Nazareth* as *his* Son and Delegate, and *our* Lord and Maſter; we ought to comply immediately with his will, aſſoon as it is made known to us. For it is apparently wrong and unreaſonable to thwart the will and authority of him who is infinitely wiſe and good, although he had no power to chaſtize us for it. It will not ſo much as bear a diſpute, whether it is wrong or not, to act counter to the injunctions of that being in *any* caſe, who in *every* caſe injoins that, and that only, which is reaſonable for him to injoin.—If he command with wiſdom and goodneſs, we cannot diſobey without folly and wickedneſs.

But after all, there is really no neceſſity of going ſo far to find our obligation to what is uſually called *moral virtue*, as to conſider its tendency to happineſs; its rendering us like to God, the ſtandard of perfection; or to inquire whether the practice of it be injoined upon us by the poſitive will and command of God. We may find the grounds of this obligation nearer home, even in our own breaſts. There is ſuch a *law written in our hearts*; ſuch an internal conſciouſneſs of the moral excellency of virtue, and of the odiouſneſs of its contrary, as really leaves us no room to doubt of our obligation to it; and ſo, in a great meaſure ſuperſedes all other arguments. For we cannot ordinarily violate the rules of juſtice, &c. without violating our own minds at the ſame time; and turning our own accuſers.

The principal objection that can be urged againſt the moral difference of actions, is taken from the difficulty there is, in ſome caſes, to determine the boundaries betwixt right and wrong; the variety of opinions that have prevailed in the world concerning queſtions of right, eſpecially in political affairs; and the different, yea, contrary

contrary laws, enacted by wiſe men in different ages and countries, and all equally under the notion of their being right and equitable. " But (to uſe the words of a learned " writer *) as in painting, two very different colours, " by diluting each other very ſlowly and gradually, " may, from the higheſt intenſeneſs in either extreme, " terminate in the midſt inſenſibly ; and ſo run one " into the other, that it ſhall not be poſſible even for a " ſkilful eye to determine exactly where the one ends " and the other begins ; and yet the colours differ as " much as can be, not in *degree* only, but intirely in " *kind*, as *red* and *blue*, or *white* and *black* : So though " perhaps it may be very difficult in ſome nice and " perplext caſes (which yet are very far from occuring " frequently) to define exactly the bounds of right and " wrong, juſt and unjuſt, and there may be ſome latitude " in the judgment of different Men, and the laws of " divers nations ; yet right and wrong are neverthe- " leſs totally and eſſentially different ; even altoge- " ther as much as white and black, light and dark- " neſs."

THE admirable writer whoſe words I have here quoted, ſeems very charitably to attribute men's intirely confounding right and wrong, to the difficulty which they find in ſome caſes, to determine what is right and equitable, and what wrong and injurious ; or to diſcern the terminating line betwixt them. And this difficulty is doubtleſs what gives men an opportunity to oppoſe the notion of ſuch a moral difference in actions, under ſome little colour of argument. However an internal perception of the moral difference of things in general, is ſo interwoven with our very nature, that it is hardly credible that any man ſhould really think all actions to be indifferent in their own nature. Or if any actually entertain ſuch an opinion, it is not *natural*. It does not proceed

* Dr. S. CLARKE.

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ſo much from men's originally wanting clear ideas of the difference in general betwixt right and wrong, as from their having *made* theſe things indifferent, as far as their own *practice* could effect it. Men have naturally as clear a conception of the general difference betwixt moral good and evil, antecedent to all conſideration of human laws and compacts, yea, to the conſideration of the will of God himſelf, as they have of the difference betwixt light and darkneſs. But as the organs of ſight may be abuſed and weakened to ſuch a degree that a man ſhall at laſt perceive no difference betwixt the night and the day: and as moſt of our other animal ſenſes may be perverted and debauched, ſo as to be incapable of anſwering their original deſign; ſo alſo men's natural conſcience of good and evil, may, by frequent violations, loſe its quickneſs; and the mind itſelf become blind, callous and inſenſible. Our natural ſenſe of the moral difference in actions and characters, may be rendered dull and uſeleſs. And thus the law written in the hearts of men by the finger of God himſelf, may be repealed, and eraſed by the powerful influence of vice: whereupon they deny that there was ever any ſuch law engraved on their minds. This is juſt as if *Moſes*, when his *anger waxed hot*, and he caſt the two *tables of the law* out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount, ſhould have immediately denied that God had ever written them, or given them to him to preſerve. It is natural for men of corrupt minds and morals, to endeavour to get rid of all uneaſy reflections upon what is paſt, and terrible preſages of what may be future, by intirely throwing aſide the diſtinction betwixt moral good and evil, as if theſe were but empty names without any meaning, invented by civil and eccleſiaſtical *tyrants* to keep the world in awe.

HOWEVER, although the vices of men may go far towards darkning their underſtandings, it is not to be ſuppoſed that the moſt degenerate of them ever arrive at ſuch

ſuch a ſtate of blindneſs as to have ne real ſenſe of the difference betwixt right and wrong, whatever they may pretend. For ſuch a ſenſe in ſome degree of it, ſeems inſeparable from a rational nature: and cannot be totally extinguiſhed, but with reaſon itſelf. And it is worth obſerving, That with how good a conſcience ſoever the great maſters of *ſcepticiſm* pretend they commit the moſt flagrant immoralities, under the notion of all things being indifferent in their own nature; yet they cannot help betraying themſelves, and ſhowing their natural ſenſe of right and wrong, upon certain occaſions. For who are more averſe than *they*, to take the character of *knave* to themſelves, though they generally take no care not to *deſerve* it? They chuſe to be eſteemed as men of honeſty and integrity. And when it comes to their own turn to be injured, they are as ready as any of their neighbours to accuſe the aggreſſor of wrong and injuſtice. If their moral ſenſe were before aſleep, ſuffering injuries awakens it in a moment. And if they are not right down *atheiſts*, they are ready to think ſtrange that God ſhould let his thunder ſleep while ſuch villanies are perpetrated. — Thus hard is it for men to diſguiſe the inward ſentiments of their hearts in this caſe: the maſk will drop off, and nature peep out in ſome unguarded hour —

If men would go no farther than to aſſert, That there are ſome queſtions of right, ſo intricate and complicated, that it is difficult, or even impoſſible, to determine them, none would contradict them but ſuch arrogant and conceited perſons as imagine their knowledge has no limits. But when, not content with this, they boldly ſtrike at the foundation of every thing that is good and praiſe worthy, by denying the moral difference of actions in general; and yet upon every turn, are complaining of injuries and abuſes, done, or offered to themſelves; it is hard to ſay whether they are more proper objects of pity or contempt; of indignation or ridicule: For they have doubtleſs a good title to all.

THERE can be no danger of being too ſevere in cenſuring men of this ſtamp. For what they ſay concerning the abſolute indifference of actions is either falſe or true. If it be falſe, nothing is too bad to be ſaid of them for thus ſetting aſide the moral difference of actions; for putting the moſt excellent virtues and the moſt odious vices upon the ſame footing; for making it as innocent for a child to murther his aged parents, as to kill a viper; and to blaſpheme his Maker, as it is to deride a ſot; and, in this way, diſſolving all the ties and obligations both of private and of ſocial virtue. But, on the other hand, if what they aſſert be true, there is not even a bare poſſibility of injuring them; for there can be no ſuch thing as wrong or injury, if all actions are abſolutely indifferent in their own nature.

I hope it in ſome meaſure appears from what has been ſaid, That as *truth* has a real exiſtence in nature, ſo the diſtinction betwixt *right* and *wrong* neceſſarily takes place in conſequence thereof. And thus I have done with the *firſt* thing propoſed.

THE next thing propoſed was to ſhow, That men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for the diſcerning of thoſe differences of which we have been ſpeaking. But this muſt be left for the ſubject of another diſcourſe.

I ſhall conclude for the preſent with an obvious inference from what has been ſaid; *viz.* That ſince *truth* and *right* have a real exiſtence in nature, independent on the *ſentiments* and *practices* of men, they do not neceſſarily follow the multitude, or major part: nor ought we to make *number* the *criterion* of the true religion. Men are fickle and various and contradictory in their opinions and practices: but truth and moral rectitude are things fixed, ſtable and uniform, having their foundation in the nature of things. They will not change their nature out of

complaiſance to the moſt numerous and powerful body of men in the world. We may *conform* to them; but they will not *condeſcend* to us. Were number the mark of truth and right, religion itſelf would be a perfect *Proteus*, ſometimes one thing, and ſometimes another, according to the opinion that happens to prevail in the world. But if one man may err, why not two? And if two, why not two thouſand? And then, why not all mankind? If truth and right are ſomewhat fixed, and men fickle and various, men may err both with reſpect to principle and practice. But upon the other hand, if truth and right have no exiſtence but in the opinions of men, then indeed they might depend upon number and multitude. But then it may be reaſonably aſked how many votes are neceſſary to change a great lie into a glorious truth? how many, to change a flagrant crime into a meritorious virtue? and a ſinner, into a ſaint? The church of *Rome* has been trying a great while to bring about theſe wonderful changes and revolutions: and has indeed effected it to the ſatisfaction of many. But nevertheleſs theſe are but ſome of the *lying wonders of him, whoſe coming is after the working of ſatan, with all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs.* It is ſtill falſe that bread is fleſh; or wine, blood. Murther remains a vice ſtill: nor is breach of faith and perjury any virtue at all.

THE *multitude* may *do evil*, and the *many*, *judge falſly*. *Iniquity* may be *eſtabliſhed by a law*; it may have all the power and wealth of the world engaged on its ſide to ſupport it, while truth and right may be left ſolitary and friendleſs. *Noah* was left alone; ſingular indeed, but ſtill *a preacher of righteouſneſs*. He was a *perfect and upright man in his generation*; and, for that reaſon, was preſerved in the ark, the multitude being firſt drowned in a flood of vice, and then deluged in a flood of water. Thus alſo was *Lot* ſingularly righteous, while the multitude in *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* firſt *burned* with impure luſts, and were then devoured with *flames* from heaven,

being

being ſet forth for an example, ſuffering the vengeance of eternal fire. And how few were there that adhered toour bleſſed Saviour while he was in this world? He was *deſpiſed and rejected of Men*, as well as *a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief.* It was the *body* of the people that was againſt him. They did not *diſcern the time*, nor *judge what was right.* Even to this day, how ſmall is the number of thoſe who *worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth*, according to the ſimplicity of the goſpel, compared to thoſe that are immerſed in groſs ignorance, ſuperſtition, and all kinds of immorality. The whole collective body of *chriſtians*, makes but a ſmall company, compared to the reſt of mankind. The *Roman Catholicks* again are much more numerous than the *Proteſtants*: and they have long ago voted *Us*, *Hereticks.* However there is no man in his ſenſes that will allow himſelf to be in an error, becauſe he cannot get ſo many hands held up in favour of his tenets, as another. Infallibility cannot be the reſult of a great *number* of *fallibles*: nor perfection be found in a large body of ſuch as are each of them, conſidered ſingly, *imperfect.* But nevertheleſs we daily ſee that the principal argument with which ſome endeavour to propagate their opinions is, that they are generally received, i. e. in that particular place or country: and if they can but add, that they were the doctrines embraced by their pious fore-fathers, this they reckon ſuch demonſtration as no man in his ſenſes can reſiſt. Such idle, ſuperficial cant may gull the thoughtleſs multitude: but will be deſpiſed by all others.

If we muſt needs be governed by number in the choice of our religion, it is certainly reaſonable to be governed by the *greateſt* number. And if ſo, we muſt be neither *Calviniſts* nor *Arminians*; *Trinitanians*, nor *Unitarians*; *Quakers*, nor *Anabaptiſts*; *Churchmen*, nor *Preſbyterians*; *Papiſts*, nor *Proteſtants*; nor *Jews*, nor *Mahometans*; but we muſt even turn *Heathens* at once,

Paganiſm

Paganiſm being the moſt univerſal *Orthodoxy* in the world.

It will be obſerved, that I have ſaid nothing for, or againſt, any of the different parties here enumerated: All I propoſe, is to ſhow the unreaſonableneſs of chuſing our religion by vote. This, conſidering the fickleneſs and capriciouſneſs of mankind, amounts to much the ſame thing with chuſing it by *lot*. For whether the major or minor part ſhall have truth and right of their ſide, is intirely precarious: To day it may be ſo; To morrow, otherwiſe.

Nor is it needleſs for us to be upon our guard in this matter, conſidering how natural it is to the generality of mankind, eſpecially to ſuch as are of an indolent, incurious make, to follow the moſt numerous and powerful party, both in principle and practice, without troubling themſelves about the merits of the cauſe. Many would almoſt ſhudder at the thought of an unfaſhionable vice, or an unpopular doctrine, who would nevertheleſs readily embrace the ſame vice and the ſame doctrine, when unattended with the diſadvantage of being contrary to the *mode*. What we abhor when out of date and faſhion, we are apt to admire upon a change of times, when it comes to be reputable. It is moſt agreeable to us to herd with the multitude; to believe and act as they do, right or wrong. This gratifies our innate propenſity towards *ſociety*: and many advantages naturally attend him that has the majority on his ſide. He procures the good-will of all about him, by falling in with their favourite opinions and practices, while the *diſſenter* is either ridiculed or railed at, and labours under innumerable inconveniences. Hence it often comes to paſs, that we are inſenſibly attached to ſuch corrupt opinions and practices as we ſhould have abhorred, had they not been reputable and popular. For the ſake of being with *the many*, we daily ſee ſome not only renounce their reaſon and underſtanding;

ſtanding; but break through all the ties of honour, friendſhip, humanity, charity and piety, making intire ſhipwreck of a good conſcience. Afterwards they imagine that number is the principal criterion of truth; and flatter themſelves that they are always ſecure of being in the right, while they adhere to that ſide that can carry the vote. This *conforming* humour is too prevalent in the world at preſent; and always was. Particularly it was ſo amongſt the *Iſraelites* in the time of *Moſes*. For which reaſon, that great *Jewiſh* Lawgiver gave them the prohibition with which I ſhall cloſe the preſent diſcourſe —— *Thou ſhalt not follow a multitude to do evil: neither ſhalt thou ſpeak in a cauſe to decline after many to wreſt judgment.*

SERMON

SERMON II.

Men, endowed with Faculties proper for diſcerning the Difference betwixt Truth and Falſhood, &c.

LUKE XII. 54——57.

And he ſaid alſo to the people, When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, There cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is.

And when ye ſee the ſouth wind blow, ye ſay, There will be heat; and it cometh to paſs.

Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth: but how is it, that ye do not diſcern this time?

Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?

THE *ſecond* thing propoſed, was to ſhow,

II. THAT as there is a natural difference betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong; ſo men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for the diſcerning of theſe differences.

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THIS is evidently implied in my text —— *How is it that ye do not diſcern this time? Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?*

IT muſt be acknowledged that the *Pyrrhoniſts*, who demand great encomiums for teaching men (not to *know* any thing, but) to *doubt* of every thing, have not generally carried their *Scepticiſm* any farther than to deny all certainty in a *relative* ſenſe, or with *reſpect to us*. To the moſt of them it appears too groſs to affirm that there is no difference in things themſelves; and ſo no ſuch thing as truth and right abſolutely, in oppoſition to error and wrong conduct. What they principally inſiſt upon is, that all things are totally incomprehenſible by us; that there is no *criterion* of truth and right; by which they may be diſtinguiſhed from error and wrong action: So that although there be, in nature, a difference betwixt them, yet *we* have no faculties for diſcovering it.

Now upon this ſtate of the caſe, it is evident that the queſtions in the text would be altogether impertinent —— as impertinent as they would have been upon the former ſuppoſition, That there is no real difference in things; but all propoſitions, equally true; and all actions, equally right. When it was aſked — *How is it that ye do not diſcern this time? Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?* it would have been eaſy and natural to anſwer — "Becauſe we have "no faculties to diſtinguiſh betwixt truth and error, "right and wrong. Theſe things are left ſo uncertain "and precarious with reſpect to us, that after all our re-"ſearches, we are as diſtant from them as ever. It is "not poſſible for the moſt critical inquirer to find the "truth in any inſtance, this being like a bird that "conſtantly flies from us with a ſpeed proportioned "to that with which we purſue it. All we can do, is "firſt to fatigue our ſelves in queſt of truth, and then

"to

" to delude our ſelves by fancying we have found " her."

SUCH is the dark and unhappy condition in which the *ſceptical* doctrine ſuppoſes mankind! doomed to total ignorance, and wandering from the right path: Or if, in any caſe, they think and act right, it is by mere *chance*; nor can they have the pleaſure of knowing it, if they happen to be in the right. But it is to be hoped that the Author of our being has not been ſo ſparing of his favours to us, as to leave us at ſuch uncertainties about every thing, eſpecially about what concerns our own welfare. However, were this really our caſe, one would think that thoſe who are ſenſible it is ſo, inſtead of deriding the doctrine of a ſupernatural revelation, (as is the practice of modern *Scepticks*) ſhould accommodate the words of *David* to their own caſe and circumſtances—*Who will ſhew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!* The blinder we are naturally, the more need we have of ſupernatural light and inſtruction.

THE doctrine of our total *incapacity* to diſtinguiſh betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong, has much the ſame aſpect upon common life, civil ſociety, philoſophy and religion, with that of the abſolute indifference of all things *in their own nature:* And the like abſurdities will follow from it. Thus (for example) it follows that there is no difference at all in men with reſpect to wiſdom and knowledge. For in order to conſtitute ſuch a difference, it is not only neceſſary that there ſhould be a natural diſtinction betwixt truth and falſhood; but alſo, that ſome, at leaſt, ſhould have faculties for diſcovering it. Knowledge, if there be any ſuch thing, conſiſts in *ſeeing* or *perceiving* truth. But if no men have a capacity for this, all men muſt be intirely deſtitute of knowledge; as deſtitute of it, as if there were in nature no diſtinction betwixt truth and error.

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THE doctrine of our inability to *diſcover* truth and right, has much the ſame aſpect upon common life, civil ſociety, philoſophy and religion, with that of the abſolute *indifference* of all things in their own nature. It as effectually precludes all inquiries concerning truth and virtue, private and publick good; and every other ſubject. For what does it ſignify to us, that there is a true and a right in nature, while it is ſuppoſed, we have no faculties for diſcovering them. If they lie intirely beyond our reach, we have no more concern with them, than if they had no exiſtence at all: and it is folly for any one to buſy himſelf about them. Nor can any man conſiſtently take ſatisfaction in his own opinions and actions, as though the former were true, and the latter, right; or blame another for error in principle or practice, while he aſſerts that there is equal evidence for the truth of all opinions, and for the regularity of all actions; i. e. no real evidence for the truth and regularity of any. Upon this ſuppoſition, he that denies his own exiſtence, and commits murther, adultery and robbery, has as much to ſay in his own vindication, as he that aſſerts a circle is not a ſquare, and ſaves his country from ruin. And from hence it appears, that thoſe who carry their *ſcepticiſm* no farther than to queſtion the abilities of men to diſcover truth and right in all caſes, are guilty of the ſame inconſiſtency with thoſe who explode the whole notion of a real diſtinction betwixt truth and right, and their contraries. For why will they attempt to inveſtigate truth? Or why will they plume themſelves upon their ſuppoſed diſcovery of this notable truth, That men are unable to diſcover truth? Why will they upbraid their antagoniſts with ignorance? Why will they, in any caſe, attempt to vindicate their own conduct, under the notion of its being right? Or why will they cènſure that of others, and reſent things under the notion of *injury?* This has ever been their practice; which goes wholly upon the ſuppoſition, that truth and right are not only ſomewhat real in nature; but alſo, that they

be *diſtinguiſhed* from their contraries, at leaſt by theſe ſagacious men themſelves. What *Ariadne's clue* can be found to extricate them from this labyrinth of folly and contradiction? If there be no *criterion* of truth, let them not pretend to have found one themſelves; and then deride others for ſuppoſing that truth may be diſcovered. There are many dogmatiſts about the world, who allow themſelves only to be the proper judges of truth and right; which is arrogant enough. But no bigotted dogmatiſt in half ſo abſurd and inſolent as the *Sceptic*. For he endeavours to make a monopoly of truth, and to engroſs the whole of that ſacred treaſure, to the beggaring of the reſt of mankind, even while the firſt (and I might add, the only) article of his creed is, *That truth cannot be diſcovered by any*. It is hard to ſay, whether this conduct has in it more of ſtupidity or of inſolence. But thus much is certain, that a thorough-pac'd *Sceptic* is the moſt ſilly, conceited and inconſiſtent bigot in the world.

He that allows of no certainty in any caſe, cannot even be ſure that he imagines there is no ſuch thing as certainty. Perhaps he may be miſtaken in thinking he believes what he ſays he believes. To ſay he is certain he believes what he thinks he does, is to admit of certainty in general, which is to give up the point in queſtion. But ſuppoſing him certainly to know what his own ſentiments are, how comes he to know that any one contradicts them; or differs from him in opinion? He need not make himſelf uneaſy at the oppoſition of any ſuppoſed adverſaries: For, upon his own ſcheme, theſe adverſaries and their oppoſition, may not be real, but wholly *imaginary*. And if one ſhould call him hard names, perſecute him for his opinion, and anſwer his arguments with a brick-bat inſtead of a ſyllogiſm, this may be *imaginary* alſo. At leaſt, he has nothing to complain of, upon his own principles; for ſuch a conduct towards him, may poſſibly be as right and reaſonable, as it is to feed

feed the hungry, and clothe the naked. And indeed ſuch treatment might poſſibly be the moſt effectual way to bring him to his ſenſes. †

But to come more directly to the point —— Some things are in themſelves ſo evidently true, that no *criterion* is neceſſary in order to our knowing them with *certainty*. Thus, for example, that we exiſt, is what we have an immediate and intuitive certainty of. And the ſame may be ſaid concerning the *reality* of all our own *ideas* and *perceptions*. That we experience pleaſure and pain; that we converſe with various objects which affect us in a different manner; that colour is one thing, and ſound another; and that ſmelling is not taſting; theſe things are ſelf-evident, and no *medium* can make them plainer. But it will perhaps be ſaid, that all this is only phanſy and imagination, there being no archetypes exiſting *without* us, of which theſe perceptions are the *images* or *repreſentations*. Be it ſo: ſtill the perceptions and ideas themſelves are *real*: this we are *certain* of, whether there be any thing *external*, of which they are the antitypes, or not. So that certainty may be had in ſome reſpects at leaſt. And this is ſufficient to our preſent purpoſe; for we are not ſpeaking concerning the *extent*, but the *certainty*, of human knowledge.

Of the truth of other things we may be certain in a different manner, *viz.* by reaſon, deducing them from other truths of which we have an intuitive knowledge. Thus it is that a thouſand mathematical truths are demonſtrated; and that with a certainty little or nothing

† *Epictetus* uſed to ſay, "Were I a ſervant to thoſe *Pyrrhoniſts*, "I ſhould take a pleaſure in tiezing them. If they ſhould bid me "pour oil into the bathing tub, I would throw brine upon their "head. If they ſhould aſk me to give them ptiſan, I would bring "them vinegar. And if they offered to complain, I would tell them "they were miſtaken; or perſwade them that the vinegar was "ptiſan; or elſe make them renounce their notions." *Bayle*'s *Hiſt.* and Crit. Dict. Art. *Phrrho*, Note K.

inferiour

inferiour to thoſe firſt principles from which they are deduced, the connection in every ſtep through the whole proceſs being ſo apparent, that to ſuppoſe the contrary would be a plain contradiction, and amount to the denying a thing to be what it is acknowledged to be. And in the ſame way many moral and religious truths may be demonſtrated alſo — As the being of a God; his power, wiſdom, goodneſs and providence: and our obligation to obey him.

For the truth of many other things we can, indeed, have no more than *probable* evidence; but which is, in many caſes, almoſt as ſatisfactory to the mind as *intuitive* and *demonſtrative* certainty. Thus who doubts but that the ſun will ſet in a few hours? — that the ſea will ebb and flow to morrow, as uſual? — that autumn will ſucceed to ſummer; winter, to autumn; and ſpring, to winter, as in times paſs? But of theſe things there is no certainty. For God has power to put a ſtop to the uſual courſe of nature; and we cannot be certain that he will not do it the next moment. Thus alſo probable evidence is all we can have for the truth of facts recorded in ancient hiſtory. Men may poſſibly deceive us. But who has ever been in ſuch a doubting humour, as to queſtion whether there have been ſuch men as *Alexander the Great*, and *Julius Cæſar*; whether they fought, and triumphed, &c? Indeed we can have no more than probable evidence that food and ſleep will refreſh us for the future, as heretofore. Our whole inſtitution of life, as it relates to the preſent world, is grounded upon evidence of this ſort, and not upon intuitive or demonſtrative certainty. Such evidence is eaſy to be had; and is ſufficient to the purpoſes of life, as daily experience ſhows us. We may, if we pleaſe, perplex ourſelves about the nature of *time*, *place* and *motion*: But men who are no philoſphers, find the way *home* at *one o'clock* without any difficulty. We may puzzle ourſelves about the *eſſences* of things, and the *manner* in which one operates

rates upon another: But experience teaches the huſbandman how to manure his fields, ſo as to make them fruitful: We all know that drink allays our thirſt, and food, our hunger; nor do we ever heſitate whether we ſhall make uſe of *them*, or of ſomething elſe, to remove thoſe natural uneaſineſſes. But ſtill there is no infallible and neceſſary connection betwixt thoſe cauſes and the effects that are uſually produced by them.

Nor is there more room for *ſcepticiſm* in relation to morals and religion, than in common life; nor indeed ſo much, with regard to the principal branches of our *duty*. But, however it comes to paſs, men take more pains to doubt in one caſe than in the other. We have ſtronger evidence for the proof of the chief articles of religion, than we have for moſt other things, of which we are fully ſatisfied. The being and perfections of God may be known without much difficulty; and theſe being known, it is as eaſy to know how we ought to conduct ourſelves towards him in general, as it is for a ſervant to know how to pleaſe a maſter whoſe temper and character he is acquainted with. And it is at leaſt as plain that the Sovereign of the world will make a diſtinction betwixt the righteous and the wicked, as that a wiſe and good prince will make a diſtinction betwixt dutiful ſubjects, and rebels.

Thus it appears, in general, that men are able to diſtinguiſh betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong. But I ſhall now make ſeveral obſervations upon this propoſition, in order farther to explain the real intention of it, to obviate ſome objections againſt it, and to guard it againſt thoſe abuſes to which it may appear liable.

And

1. It is not intended in this aſſertion, that all men have *equal abilities* for judging what is true and right. The whole creation is diverſified, and men in particular. There is a great variety in their intellectual faculties.

That

That which principally diſtinguiſhes ſome men from the beaſts of the field, is the different formation of their bodies. Their bodies are *human*, but they are in a manner *brute* all beſide. Whether the difference that there is in the natural powers of men, proceeds from the original make of their minds, or from ſome difference in thoſe bodily organs upon which the *exerciſe* of the rational faculties may be ſuppoſed to depend; it is apparent that there is, in fact, ſuch a difference. And therefore when it is ſaid that men are able to judge what is true and right, it muſt be underſtood in ſuch a ſenſe as is conſiſtent with this fact. Thoſe of the lower claſs can go but a little ways with their inquiries into the natural and moral conſtitution of the world. But even theſe may have the power of judging, in *ſome degree*. However, upon ſuppoſition that ſome were wholly ignorant even of their own exiſtence, it does not follow that all muſt be ſo, any more than that all bodies muſt be round, becauſe ſome are of that particular figure. From the moſt dull and ſtupid of the human ſpecies, there is a continual riſe or gradation, there being as great a variety in the intellectual powers of men, as in their bodily and active powers. And ſo it may be true of ſome in an higher and more proper ſenſe than of others, that they may *even of themſelves judge what is right*. Many things are obvious, and, in a manner firſt principles to *them*, which to others are myſterious and incomprehenſible.

2. As a farther limitation of this aſſertion, I would obſerve, that it does not imply, that the *ſame perſons* are equally adequate judges of truth and right, in all conditions and circumſtances. There is a great difference in the powers of different men: But no one differs more from another than he does from himſelf, conſidered in childhood and mature life, before and after his mind is cultivated by ſtudy and exerciſe. The *man* knows what the *child* was ignorant of. We come into the world ignorant of every thing. But he that, in his natural, rude

rude and uncultivated ſtate, is unqualified to judge what is true and right, unleſs it be in a few obvious caſes, is capable of conſiderable improvements by ſtudy and experience. Our intellectual faculties were given us to improve: they ruſt for want of uſe; but are brightened by exerciſe. Exerciſe ſtrengthens and invigorates our mental faculties as well as our bodily. And the more a man habituates himſelf to intellectual employments, the greater will be his aptneſs and facility in diſcovering truth, and detecting error. Without ſome previous ſtudy and application, it is as impoſſible that men ſhould be accurate judges of truth and right, as it is that they ſhould be compleat artificers in any mechanical buſineſs, without ſpending time to learn the trade. They may *bungle* and *cobble*; but can do nothing that will bear the inſpection of a *maſter-workman*. It is the unhappineſs of a great part of mankind that they do not ſufficiently conſider this natural weakneſs, ineptitude and awkwardneſs of human reaſon before cultivation; but ſit down contented with their imaginary ſagacity and promptneſs of underſtanding, without uſing the proper means to qualify them for judging of things that may come under their conſideration. Hence it is that we have ſo many *quacks* and ignorant pretenders in all arts and ſciences — What need of ſtudy to come at an acquaintance with thoſe ſubjects which we may underſtand at any time only by opening our eyes? Who will deſcend into the bowels of the earth to dig for gold, while it lies in plenty within his reach upon the ſurface of the ground? Who will dive for pearls, while he imagines they float upon the waves? Or what need has that field of tillage, whoſe ſoil is ſo fertile, that, like that of *Eden*, it produces ſpontaneouſly the richeſt fruits? When men imagine that the depths of ſcience may be fathomed by a ſingle glance of thought, without any previous application to intellectual exerciſes, it can not be expected that they ſhould be able to determine juſtly upon any points but ſome of the moſt familiar and obvious. In

this

this caſe, he that was *born like the wild aſſes-colt*, muſt needs continue to be ſo; or, at beſt, come to maturity, and grow up into an aſs himſelf.

THE alteration which time and ſtudy make in the abilities of men for judging concerning truth and right, is ſufficient to account for the diverſity of ſentiments entertained by the *ſame perſons* at different periods of their life, without having recourſe to *ſcepticiſm*, or ſuppoſing all our notions, from firſt to laſt, to be mere phanſy and illuſion. A man may err once without erring always. Nor can we argue from the reveries of youth, and the abſurd conceits of the illiterate, that all mankind are but a mighty nation of fools and lunaticks, pleaſing themſelves with idle dreams and deluſive appearances, inſtead of realities.

3. THAT men are able *even of themſelves to judge what is right*, does not imply, that they can receive no aſſiſtance from books, and the converſation of learned men; Or that they may judge as well without theſe helps, as with them. Although all men are capable of diſcerning truth and right in ſome degree, by the bare exerciſe of their own natural faculties, it does not follow that they can ſtand in no need of any foreign aid, in order to their judging in a more perfect manner. The more knowing may be helpful to others in their purſuit of knowledge. And the abilities of men for reaſoning juſtly, and judging truly, may depend, in a great meaſure, upon the method of their education, the books they read, and the genius and abilities of the perſons they converſe with. Who will pretend that the natives of *Greenland*, or the *Cape of Good Hope*, enjoy the ſame, or equal, means of knowledge, with thoſe that are born in the polite and learned nations of *Europe?* Who imagines that one brought up at the plough is as likely to form right notions of things, as if he had been educated at a univerſity? Or that a man who has converſed

verſed only with ordinary Mechanics, has the ſame advantages with thoſe who have enjoyed the familiarity of the greateſt proficients in literature? To ſuppoſe theſe things, is to contradict daily experience. And, therefore, to decline all aſſiſtances from others in the ſearch of knowledge, under a notion, that we are able to *judge even of ourſelves what is right*, is pride and vanity, and not the part of an ingenuous inquirer after truth. This may be allowed by the moſt ſtrenuous aſſerter of mens natural abilities, and natural right, to judge for themſelves, without any appearance of inconſiſtency or contradiction. For it amounts to no more than this, that ſome men are ſuperiour to others, and may help them to the knowledge of ſome things which they would not have known without their aſſiſtance.

4. It is not implied in this doctrine, that mens intellectual powers have no bounds at all; or that they are equally able to determine upon all points, although they ſhould improve all the helps to knowledge, and cultivate their reaſon in the beſt manner poſſible. There are many caſes wherein the wiſeſt of men are unable to form any judgment at all —— difficulties which they cannot ſolve —— heights which they cannot climb —— depths which they cannot fathom —— Some may, perhaps, think this a reflection upon human underſtanding. And indeed it is ſo, if it be any reflection upon it to ſay, that it is not infinite like that of God; but not otherwiſe. To ſay that human reaſon is confined to a certain ſphere, beyond which it cannot penetrate, is, in reality, no more than to aſſert that man is a finite, and not an infinite, being; a creature, and not the Creator. There are probably created intelligences much ſuperiour to man even *in his beſt eſtate*: But it is no derrogation from their real dignity, to ſay they are not omniſcient. Why then ſhould man graſp at omniſcience? imagine he may know every thing becauſe he may know ſome?

and look upon it as a reproach, when it is ſaid that his reaſon, and all his other faculties are circumſcribed ?

We may know what is proper to be known by beings of our rank, ſo as to fill our place, and anſwer the deſign of our creation, without being able to comprehend all things. We may know that *this earth* is inhabited by creatures, the law of whoſe nature is virtue, and its end happineſs ; although we cannot certainly tell whether the *planets* are inhabited, or not ; or, if they are, by what kind of beings ; and what their condition and circumſtances. We may know, in general, what tends to health and felicity in this world, although the real eſſences of things ſhould be beyond our reach. We may know that whatever *came into exiſtence*, (as it is demonſtrable that every thing did which we behold) muſt have ſome *inviſible* cauſe adequate to it, although we were not able to form a clear idea of creative power, or the manner of its exertion. We may know that beauty, order, harmony and deſign, in the works of nature, preſuppoſe a *deſigner*, or, intelligent artificer ; although we cannot comprehend the ſyſtem of the univerſe. We may know that a conſtitution of things, actually tending to happineſs, muſt be the product of goodneſs, although we are not able exactly to define, beforehand, that ſyſtem the correſpondent parts of which ſhall be ſo adjuſted as to effect the greateſt poſſible good. We may know in general that the Author of the world muſt be a wiſe and good being, although the final cauſes of ſome things which we ſee in it, are beyond our ſight. In fine, we may know that *God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him* ; although we cannot *by ſearching find out the almighty unto perfection* ; or comprehend his nature ; or ſee through the whole ſcheme of his works, government and providence.

The wiſeſt of men was not aſhamed to own this imperfection of human reaſon, even under its greateſt improvements,

improvements, and carried to its moſt exalted pitch. *When I applied mine heart to know wiſdom*, ſays Solomon, *then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out all the work that is done under the ſun; becauſe though a man ſeek it out, yet ſhall he not find it; yea farther, though a wiſe man think to know it, yet ſhall he not be able to find it.* However *Solomon* was no *Sceptic*. In the ſame book we find him ſaying, *that wiſdom excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth darkneſs:* And with him the concluſion of the whole matter is,—*Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man.* Whatever he might be in doubt about, he was ſatisfied of this, That there was a God who governed the world, that his will and commandments might be known, and that the buſineſs and happineſs of man, conſiſts in obeying them.

Again,

5. When it is ſaid we are able *even of ourſelves to judge what is right*, this is not deſigned to ſuggeſt that our intellectual faculties are ſo capacious as to render a *ſupernatural revelation* of no uſe or importance to us. Certainly we cannot ſuppoſe this to be the intention of him that uttered the words of our text, ſince one of the titles which he took upon himſelf, was that of a *Prophet*, or a *Teacher ſent from God*. And indeed it neceſſarily follows from the ſuppoſition of our rational faculties being *limited*, that there is *room* for our being inſtructed by revelation. If one man may inſtruct another, much more may we ſuppoſe it poſſible for *him that is perfect in knowledge* to ſupply the natural defects of human reaſon by a ſupernatural communication of light and knowledge. When, and how far, it is expedient for him to do this, He only knows. However upon ſuppoſition of ſuch a revelation, we muſt be ſuppoſed to be able to ſee the evidence of its being ſuch. It is the proper office of reaſon to determine whether what is propoſed to us under the notion of a revelation from God, be attended with ſuitable atteſtations and credentials,

dentials, or not. So that even in this caſe, we may *of ourſelves judge what is right.* If there be no rational evidence of its coming from God, no rational man can receive it as ſuch: And, on the other hand, if it be accompanied with rational evidence, no reaſonable man can reject it. Indeed what Jeſus Chriſt, particularly blames the *Jews* for in the text, is their not exerciſing their reaſon in this way. He had ſufficiently proved his divine miſſion; but they would not *diſcern the time*, nor *judge what was right*, being under the influence of prejudice, and not of reaſon.

MOREOVER, it is the proper office of reaſon to determine the meaning of the particular parts of a revelation, after the divine authority of it in general is eſtabliſhed and allowed. And this mens natural faculties qualify them for, much in the ſame manner that they qualify them for interpreting other writings. If God gives men a revelation, he gives it to be underſtood by men: And if he gives it to be underſtood by men, he muſt give it in human language, and accommodate it to human capacity. For otherwiſe, a ſecond revelation would be neceſſary to explain the firſt: And then, why not a third to explain the ſecond; and ſo on *in infinitum?* And ſo nothing would be really *revealed* after all.

I ſhall juſt add in the

6th, and laſt place, as a farther limitation of the propoſition before us, That it does not intend that we are able to determine, with an equal degree of certainty, all points which we are capable, in ſome ſenſe, of coming to a concluſion about. Although truth does not admit of *degrees*, yet the evidence of truth does. So that of various propoſitions equally true in themſelves, ſome may be known with greater certainty than others. Probable evidence is indeed all that can be had in moſt caſes, as was obſerved before. It is by virtue of this,

that

that the intercourſe of man with man, and all the buſineſs and commerce of the world, is carried on. Experience ſhows that ſuch evidence is ſufficient in *ſecular* affairs: And it may be ſufficient in *religious* affairs alſo, in thoſe caſes where abſolute certainty cannot be had.

I ſhall now conclude this head concerning the certainty and ſufficiency of human knowledge, with the words of Mr. *Locke*. "If—any one," ſays he, "will be "ſo ſceptical as to diſtruſt his ſenſes, and to affirm that "all we ſee and hear, feel and taſte, think and do, dur-"ing our whole being, is but the ſeries and deluding "appearances of a long dream, whereof there is no rea-"lity; and therefore will queſtion the exiſtence of all "things, or our knowledge of any thing: I muſt deſire "him to conſider, that if all be a dream, then he doth "but dream that he makes the queſtion; and ſo it is "not much matter, that a waking man ſhould anſwer "him. But yet, if he pleaſes, he may dream that I "make him this anſwer, that the certainty of things ex-"iſting *in rerum natura*, when we have the teſtimony of "our ſenſes for it, is not only as great as our frame can "attain to, but as our condition needs. For our facul-"ties being ſuited not to the full extent of being, nor to a "perfect, clear and comprehenſive knowledge of things, "free from all doubt and ſcruple; but to the preſer-"vation of us in whom they are; and accommodated "to the uſe of life; they ſerve our purpoſe well enough, "if they will but give us certain notice of thoſe things "which are convenient, or inconvenient to us. For he "that ſees a candle burning, and hath experimented the "force of its flame, by putting his finger in it, will "little doubt that this is ſomething exiſting,—which "does him harm, and puts him to great pain: which is "aſſurance enough, when no man requires greater "certainty to govern his actions by, than what is as "certain as his actions themſelves. And if our dreamer "pleaſes to try, whether the glowing heat of a glaſs furnace

" furnace, be barely a wandring imagination, in a drowſy
" man's fancy; by putting his hand into it, he may per-
" haps be wakened into a certainty, that it is ſomething
" more than bare imagination. So that this evidence is
" as great as we can deſire, being as certain to us as
" our pleaſure or pain, i. e. happineſs or miſery; be-
" yond which we have no concernment, either of know-
" ing or being."†

THUS it appears that men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for diſtinguiſhing betwixt truth and error, right and wrong. And hence it follows, that the doctrine of a total ignorance, and incapacity to judge of moral and religious truths, brought upon mankind by the apoſtacy of our *Firſt Parents*, is without foundation. How much brighter and more vigorous our intellectual faculties were in *Adam*, ſix thouſand years before we had any exiſtence, I leave others to determine. It is ſufficient for my purpoſe to conſider mankind as they are at preſent, without inquiring what they were before they had any being. And it appears that they have now a natural power to judge what is true and right, with the reſtrictions mentioned above. But it is, nevertheleſs, the manner of vain *Enthuſiaſts*, when the abſurdity of their doctrines is laid open, to fall a railing, telling their oppoſers that they are in a *carnal ſtate*, *blind*, and unable to judge: but that themſelves are *ſpiritually illuminated*. Thus they endeavour to palm the groſſeſt abſurdities upon their neighbours, under the notion of their being divine truths and holy myſteries: So that theſe enlightened Ideots make inſpiration, and the Spirit of truth and wiſdom, the vehicle of nonſenſe and contradictions. Whatever is reaſonable, is, with them, carnal: and nothing is worthy of belief, but what is impoſſible and abſurd in the eye of human reaſon.

† Mr. *Locke*'s works, edit. 4th Vol. I. *p.* 312.

WE

We ſee that our Bleſſed Saviour did not ſuppoſe that the minds of men had ſuffered any ſuch total eclipſe, or were wholly overſpread with darkneſs. He addreſſes the unbelieving *Jews* as if they had proper faculties for judging of religious truths; and blames them for not exerting them—*why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*——The *candle of the Lord* which was lighted up in man at firſt, when *the inſpiration of the almighty gave him underſtanding*, was not extinguiſhed by the original apoſtacy, but has kept burning ever ſince. The divine flame has catcht from father to ſon; and has been propagated quite down to the preſent generation: Nor will it be put out 'till the *ſun himſelf ſhall be darkned, and the moon ſhall not give her light.*

Let us retain a ſuitable ſenſe of the dignity of our nature in this reſpect. It is by our reaſon that we are exalted above the beaſts of the field. It is by this, that we are allied to angels, and all the glorious intelligences of the heavenly world: Yea, by this we reſemble God himſelf. It is principally on account of our reaſon, that we are ſaid to have been *created in the image of God.* So that how weak ſoever our intellectual faculties are, yet to ſpeak reproachfully of reaſon in general, is nothing leſs than blaſphemy againſt God. Let us, therefore, inſtead of contemning this ineſtimable gift, in which conſiſts the glory of our nature, employ it to the ends for which it was deſigned, in the ſervice of the great Father of our ſpirits.

But we have had occaſion, in this diſcourſe, to ſpeak of the imperfection, as well as of the ſtrength, of human reaſon. He that is not ſenſible of this imperfection, is ſo far from being the wiſeſt of men, that he *knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know it. Profeſſing himſelf to be wiſe, he becomes a fool*; the knowledge of ourſelves being the firſt, laſt, point, the *alpha* and *omega* of human wiſdom. The knowledge of our own ignorance, is the moſt

moſt important and beneficial of all ſciences. This will naturally lead us to humility; and excite us to improve, with gratitude and diligence, all the means of knowledge which we are favoured with; eſpecially that revelation which God has given us by his Son, whom he has ſent from heaven to be *a light unto the Gentiles*, as well as *the glory of his people Iſrael.* A Senſe of our ignorance would alſo teach us modeſty in criticiſing the works of nature and providence. The ſcheme of God's government is vaſt; our underſtandings are narrow, and not proportion'd to it. We are at preſent, as it were, but rational beings in *embrio*, unborn to light and knowledge. At leaſt we are mere *babes* in ſpeculation; we *ſpeak as children*; we *think as children*; we *underſtand as children*: But perhaps we may e'erlong *become men, and put away childiſh things.* 'Till we arrive at that maturity of life and knowledge, towards which we are in progreſs during our abode in the preſent world, we ought not to think ſtrange that our underſtandings are baffled; or that many things remain myſterious and unaccountable to us, both in the natural and moral government of God. And inſtead of boldly cenſuring the author of the univerſe, as taking wrong meaſures in any reſpect, it becomes us to uſe that humble language, not only of a great man, but an inſpired *apoſtle*— *O! the depths of the riches both of the wiſdom and knowledge of God! How unſearchable are his judgments; and his ways paſt finding out!*——*Now to the King eternal, immortal, inviſible, the only wiſe God, be honour and glory forever, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Amen.

SERMON

SERMON III.

The Right and Duty of private Judgment asſerted.

LUKE XII. 54——57.

And he ſaid alſo to the people, When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, There cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is.

And when ye ſee the ſouth wind blow, ye ſay, There will be heat; and it cometh to paſs.

Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth: but how is it, that ye do not diſcern this time?

Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?

HAVING attempted to ſhow, in two former diſcourſes upon theſe words, That there is a natural difference betwixt truth and falſhood, right and wrong: And, That men are naturally endowed with faculties proper for the diſcerning of theſe differences: I proceed now to ſhow in the

IIId. *And laſt place*, That men are under obligation to exert theſe faculties; and to judge for themſelves in things of a religious concern. It cannot be doubted but that this is fairly implied in my text. For the words evidently carry in them a ſevere cenſure and reproof of the perſons to whom they were originally addreſſed, on account of their neglecting to judge for themſelves concerning our bleſſed Saviour, and his doctrine. He makes this neglect, an argument of their hypocriſy, one of the baſeſt vices — *Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky — and why, even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*

The ſubject before us being the duty of private judgment, I ſhall briefly explain what I intend by perſons judging for themſelves; or by freedom of thought and inquiry in religious matters: And then ſhow, that this is what we are all obliged to.

Now what I intend by a man's judging for himſelf with freedom, and exerting his own faculties in the ſearch of truth and right, may be compriſed under the following particulars —

That he ſuſpends his judgment intirely concerning the truth or falſhood of all doctrines; and the fitneſs or unfitneſs of all actions; 'till ſuch time as he ſees ſome reaſon to determine his judgment one way rather than the other. He that deſires to come to the knowledge of the truth, puts himſelf in a ſtate of *indifferency* with regard to the point to be judged of; that ſo his mind being as it were, in *æquilibrio*, his judgment may be determined ſolely by reaſon and argument. He does not bring his old prejudices and prepoſſeſſions to determine the point; but comes prepared, by an unbiaſſed mind, to receive the impreſſions of reaſon, and of reaſon only. All propoſitions are the proper ſubject of inquiry and examination, except *firſt principles*, which are few in number,

number, and which do not extend to any doctrines either of *natural* or *revealed* religion, how nearly ſoever they may be connected with ſome of *both*. And therefore, in order to our judging with true freedom, we ought to conſider all ſuch doctrines with an eye of indifferency, neither fancying them to be true or falſe; nor even *wiſhing* them to be ſo, till we ſee they are connected with, or contrary to, ſome of thoſe firſt principles of human knowledge, which being ſelf evident, are not the ſubject of examination. Thus, for example, we ought not to believe that there is, or that there is not a God; that the Chriſtian religion is from God, or an impoſture; that any particular doctrine fathered upon it, is really contained in it, or not; or that any particular ſect of chriſtians, is in the right, or in the wrong; 'till we have impartially examined the matter, and ſee evidence on one ſide or the other. For to determine any point without reaſon or proof, cannot be to judge *freely*, unleſs it be in a bad ſenſe of the word. So that ſuſpenſe or indifferency, is the firſt thing implied in free inquiry: or, to ſpeak more properly, it is a pre-requiſite, and preparatory to it.

Again: The next ſtep towards freedom of examination and judgment, is the exerting of our own reaſon in weighing arguments and evidences that offer themſelves to us, or that are offered by others. He that inquires freely after truth, is not content with barely ſuſpending his judgment till ſuch time as evidence forces it ſelf upon his mind. In this way, a man may perhaps avoid error; but will not gain much knowledge; for truth is coy, and muſt be courted. To gain any conſiderable degree of knowledge, it is neceſſary that we are active and vigorous in the purſuit of it; that we make uſe of all the means and helps to knowledge that are within our reach; that we inquire into facts; that we view things in different lights, not taking up ſatisfied with firſt appearances; that we weigh the arguments

that

that are brought to ſupport any doctrine or practice; that we balance them with contrary arguments; and the like.

ANOTHER thing implied in the freedom of judgment is, that a man honeſtly *embraces* for truth, whatever there appears evidence for, without endeavouring to evade it, to ſhift it off, or ſtifle the conviction of his own mind. To inquire into evidence, is to no purpoſe, unleſs we follow it wherever it leads, and chearfully receive the truth wherever it is to be found; whatever notions it may contradict; whatever cenſures it may expoſe us to. It is an idle and inconſiſtent thing to examine, if we are determined before hand to retain our former ſentiments; to believe as our fore-fathers did, or as any particular body of men does at preſent. A man does not really inquire after truth and right at all, unleſs he determines from the very firſt, to have no ſuperſtitious veneration for *great names*; but to yield himſelf up to evidence wherever it appears; and how much ſoever it might have contributed to his preſent intereſt and reputation to have embraced other tenets.

LASTLY: Judging with freedom and impartiality, implies, that in giving our aſſent to any propoſition, we give it in proportion to the degree of evidence that appears to ſupport it. All truths are not equally clear and inconteſtible: Innumerable lie quite beyond our ſight; ſome juſt dawn upon our minds; others appear in a ſtrong and convincing light, tho' not ſo ſtrong as to exclude all doubt; while others glare upon us with all the force of demonſtration. Now as there are innumerable degrees of evidence betwixt the loweſt probability, and that intuitive certainty which we have of firſt principles; ſo a man ought not to give the ſame degree of aſſent to every thing he receives for truth; but to proportion his aſſent to the nature and degree of the apparent evidence, whether it be greater or leſs. Not to aſſent to what is, in the

the loweſt degree, probable upon the whole, diſcovers a backwardneſs to entertain the truth. And, on the other hand, to give an aſſent to any truth, over and beyond what the nature of its evidence naturally demands and calls forth, is much the ſame thing with believing without any evidence at all. For all that redundancy of aſſent, if I may ſo expreſs it, is mere credulity and raſhneſs: and this is as unbecoming a reaſonable creature as obſtinacy and perverſeneſs.

HAVING thus briefly explained what I intend by judging for ourſelves, with freedom, I proceed now to ſhow, That this is what every man is under obligation to do. This I propoſe to prove *directly* by reaſon and revelation; and then to anſwer the principal *objections* that are urged againſt it.

EACH individual has an intereſt of *his own* depending. We find, by experience, that we are all capable of being happy or miſerable to a great degree. Pain and pleaſure, at leaſt, are private and perſonal things. And even they that arrogate to themſelves the right of *judging for us*, do not pretend to *feel for us* alſo. Now if it be of any importance to us to be happy for ourſelves, it is of importance to judge for ourſelves alſo; for this is abſolutely neceſſary in order to our finding the path that leads to happineſs. Indeed if others can afford us any aſſiſtance in finding this path, it is reaſonable to make uſe of it; but not to give ourſelves up intirely to their direction. It is the greateſt folly imaginable, to give ourſelves no concern about our own welfare, unleſs we were certain it is ſecured to us already, ſo that we cannot poſſibly miſs of it, which is a ſuppoſition contrary to daily experience. We find that our happineſs depends, at leaſt in ſome degree, upon our conduct; and that we often take ſome wrong ſtep, through ignorance; which ought to be a warning to us to look about us, and take heed to our ways. — Without knowing which is the

right

right path, we can never take it, unleſs it be by *chance*; and though we ſhould be ſo fortunate as to get into it, we cannot have the ſatisfaction of knowing it.

In our preſent imperfect ſtate, ſuch inquiries as the following, become every man that has not yet reſolved them in his own mind — "What is my chief good? "Where is the road that will convey me to my happi- "neſs? Where ſhall I find this ineſtimable jewel? this "*pearl of great price?* In what mountain ſhall I dig for "it? In what ocean ſhall I dive? Amidſt the various "opinions, and contrary purſuits of mankind, what road "ſhall I myſelf travel? What courſe ſhall I ſteer? "Shall I find my felicity in retirement and ſolitude? "Or in the noiſe and buſtle of the world? Is it to be "found in the humble and quiet cottage? Or in proud "and envious courts? Is it to be found in peace at "home? Or in war abroad? Does it conſiſt in indulg- "ing to my animal nature without controul? Or in im- "proving my mind in what ſome men call *wiſdom* and "*virtue?* Shall I ſeek it in my own country? Or ex- "plore ſome diſtant region in hopes to find it? Shall I "ſearch it upon the ſeas, or upon the dry land? In the "earth beneath, or in the heavens above? In this world, "or in *ſome other?* Is my ſpirit immortal? Am I to "ſurvive the diſſolution of my body, and to live forever "in ſome other ſtate? Or ſhall this vital ſpark that "thinks, perceives and wills, and is anxious about futu- "rity, be wholly extinguiſhed in a few days, when my "body falls to duſt? Is there any being who created, "and who governs the world? Or is this beautiful and "ſtupendous fabrick of the univerſe, the offspring of "chance? And without any *guide*, *overſeer* or *ruler*? — "a fatherleſs World, which the next moment may fall "into ruins, or into nothing? If there be a God, what "is his character? Is he powerful, wiſe, righteous and "good; or is he not? Does my happineſs depend "upon pleaſing and obeying him, and conforming my- "ſelf to his will? If it does, what is his will? What are

"his

" his laws? What does he expect of me? What kind of
" government is it I am under? What is the particular
" and certain way, in which I may obtain the good-will
" of this great Parent of the world, *in whose favour is*
" *life, and whose loving-kindness is better than life?*"

THESE, methinks, are such inquiries as every man should endeavour to get some satisfaction about in his own mind — satisfaction of quite another kind than any that can be had barely from the decisions of others concerning them. The questions are too interesting and important to be submitted to the determination of a second person.

BUT were we disposed to leave matters of this consequence to reference, who shall be the judges? There are almost as many opinions in the world, as there are men. The *Talapoins* of *Siam* have one system of religion: the *Mufti* at *Constantinople*, another: and Christians, a third; and so on. And almost all alledge divine revelation in their own favour. There are even some *fools* who *say in their heart, there is no God*; and not only in their *heart*, but repeat it with their *lips* also. Now shall we submit to the *Theists*, or to the *Atheists?* How shall we know on which side the truth lies, without examination? But suppose we embrace *Theism*, what sect of the *Theists* shall we fall in with? With those who deny, or those who maintain, a revelation from God? Is it reasonable to give in to either party, before we inquire which has the best of the Argument? But suppose we fall in with the *latter*, there are several sects of them, the principal of which are *Jews*, *Mahometans* and *Christians*. It cannot be a *reasonable* part to fall in with one, in opposition to the other two, *without reason*. But suppose we are convinced that the *Christian* religion is true, do not *Christians* differ very widely in their sentiments? Do they not differ so much in explaining the doctrines of their common revelation, as to agree in hardly any thing besides the name

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of *Chriſtian?* Are they not divided into many ſects, the moſt of which ſtrenuouſly maintain, that not only truth, but ſalvation alſo, is confined to themſelves? Do they not deal out their curſes mutually with a liberal hand? Are they not continually *throwing fire-brands, arrows and death*, (not indeed in *ſport*, like other *fools*, but) in ſober earneſt?

Now amidſt theſe differences and altercations, what is the part of a reaſonable man, but to ſit down, and exerciſe, as well as he can, his own intellectual powers; and ſo to *judge even of himſelf what is right?* What ſyſtem of doctrine — what mode of worſhip — what form of church-government and diſcipline, is moſt agreable to ſcripture and reaſon — what ſect of *Chriſtians* he ſhall unite with — and whether with any one, in all its minute and diſtinguiſhing tenets and uſages —? "A man muſt "join himſelf to the *true, primitive* and *catholic* church." What church is that? all churches lay claim to that title: and the queſtion to be decided is, which of them ſupports its claim the beſt? which cannot be decided without previous inquiry. "But there is a *living infallible* "*guide* upon earth, to whom it is eaſy to repair; and "then we may be ſure of being in the right without "any farther trouble." Where is he? Many deny there is any ſuch unerring guide, and infallible umpire, as confidently as others affirm it. But even thoſe who agree that there is ſuch a ſovereign judge of religious controverſy, are not yet fully agreed who he is; or whether infallibility be to be found in one ſingle perſon or more. The heads of all ſects uſually decide diſputable matters with full as much aſſurance and lordlineſs as it would become infallibility itſelf to do it, although they do not all, in ſo many words, pretend to be exempted from a poſſibility of erring. Thoſe who claim infallibility, often decide and order as if they were fallible: And thoſe who do not claim it, are often full as poſitive, and given to domineering as much, as if it unqueſtionably belonged to them.

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We know the *King* of *Great Britain* (or the *Queen*, in a female reign) is the *Supreme Head* of the church of *England*, as by law eſtabliſhed; which church claims *power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controverſies of faith.*

But his *Holineſs* at *Rome* thinks this a bold infringement of his prerogative, and univerſal juriſdiction in eccleſiaſtical matters. Whoſe word, then, is to be taken? How ſhall we act a rational part without *judging even of ourſelves which is in the right?* Or whether either of them be ſo. Indeed there is no doubt but his *Holineſs* is really the *Supreme Head* of the church of *Rome*; and, as ſuch, has authority *therein* in matters of faith, worſhip and diſcipline. Thus alſo the *King* or *Queen* of *Great Britain*, is doubtleſs the *Supreme Head* of the truly *primitive, apoſtolical* church of *England*, as *lately eſtabliſhed* by *human laws*. But nevertheleſs, it may perhaps admit of ſome diſpute whether *Jeſus Chriſt* is not the *Supreme Head* of *his own* church? and conſequently, whether theſe are not three different churches, they having each of them a different *Supreme Head?* It is of ſome importance to us to be ſettled with regard to theſe points; and they are ſuch as cannot be well determined without ſome examination, though perhaps a very little may ſuffice.

Thus it appears that a regard to our own intereſt ought to put us upon examining and judging for ourſelves in religious concerns. The ſame thing might be argued from the faculty of reaſon itſelf, which is common to all. If we ſuppoſe an intelligent author of our nature, who had ſome *deſign* in giving us our preſent conſtitution, it is plain that his end in endowing us with faculties proper for the inveſtigating of truth and right, was, that we ſhould exerciſe them in this way. Each of our bodily organs, and animal faculties, has an apparent *final cauſe*. Our eyes are for ſeeing; our ears, for hearing; our hands, for handling; our feet, for walking-

ing; &c. Nor is it leſs apparent that our underſtandings were given us to be employed in the ſearch of truth, and in embracing it. Truth is the natural object of reaſon, as much as any thing elſe is the proper object of that particular faculty or paſſion, to which God and nature have adapted it. Our obligation, therefore, to inquire after truth, and to judge what is right, may be found within us, in our own frame and conſtitution. This obligation is as univerſal as reaſon itſelf; for every one that is endowed with this faculty, is, by the very nature of it, obliged to exerciſe it in the purſuit of knowledge; eſpecially of moral and religious knowledge. All men are not obliged to ſtudy the *mathematicks*, *law* and *phyſick*. But all are obliged to acquaint themſelves with their *duty* — what they owe to God, to their neighbour and themſelves. If one man is to think and judge for all the reſt of the ſpecies, why was reaſon given to all? why was it not confined to him alone who has a right to uſe it? In ſhort, we may ſay with as much propriety, that we are to ſee only with another's eyes, hear with another's ears, ſpeak with another's tongue, and walk with another's feet, and neglect our own; as, that we are to think and judge and believe, with another's underſtanding.

It appears, then, that reaſon is no enemy to free inquiry, and private judgment, in religious matters. And I ſhall now endeavour to ſhow that the *Chriſtian religion* is no enemy to it; but, on the contrary, enjoins it upon us as a duty.

Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, *the author and finiſher of our faith*, conſtantly appealed to the ſenſes, and to the reaſon of mankind, as the proper judges of his miracles, divine miſſion and doctrine. He did not demand of men an implicit and blind belief in himſelf, without offering matter of conviction to their underſtandings; but put them upon examining in a ſober rational way, whether he

he was authorized from heaven, or were an impoſtor; and ſo, whether his doctrine were *of God, or whether he ſpake of himſelf.* He reaſons with the *Jews* in my text: he blames them for their blind attachment to the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, their *ſpiritual guides*; and for not judging for themſelves in religious matters. Our Lord, pretended (at leaſt) to prove his divine miſſion to the unprejudiced reaſon of mankind in a ſober, argumentative way. In diſputing with the *Jews*, he appealed to their ancient writings whoſe divine authority they acknowledged; and to the miracles which he wrought, in order to convince them that he was the *Meſſiah.* This is evident from almoſt every page of the evangelical hiſtory, notwithſtanding what the diſingenuous author of *Chriſtianity not founded upon argument*, has confidently aſſerted upon this ſubject, taking advantage of what ſome weak Chriſtians have advanced concerning the nature and grounds of *faith.* Whether the arguments which our Lord uſed for the conviction of the *Jews*, were concluſive or not, is a queſtion which I am not now concerned with. But it is plain that he conſidered them as being ſo, requiring people to examine them, and to judge whether they were concluſive or not. Barely propoſing arguments to the conſideration of another, is a diſclaiming of *authority* properly ſo called: for it implies, that the arguments are to be judged of by the reaſon of him to whom they are propoſed. I might bring many paſſages from the *Evangeliſts*, to ſhow that the method which our Lord took to gain proſelytes, was to *reaſon* them into faith. But I muſt content myſelf with quoting one paſſage only to this purpoſe, for the preſent — *John* v. 31. and onward, *If I bear witneſs of myſelf, my witneſs is not true* [i. e. my teſtimony in my own favour — my declaring myſelf to be the *Meſſiah*, ought not to be depended upon as true, without farther evidence.] *There is another that beareth witneſs of me — Ye ſent unto John, and he bare witneſs unto the truth — But I have greater witneſs than that of John; for the works*

works that the Father hath given me to finiſh, the ſame works that I do, bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me — Search the ſcriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which teſtify of me — There is one that accuſeth you, even Moſes, in whom ye truſt. For had ye believed Moſes, ye would have believed me. But if ye believe not his writings, how ſhall ye believe my words? There cannot be a more explicit appeal than this, to the reaſon and underſtandings of men, or a fairer invitation given them to examine and judge for themſelves. And this alſo ſhows that our Lord aimed at bringing men to believe in him, only by dint of argument. And as our Lord performed his mighty works with a deſign to beget in thoſe that beheld them, a rational belief, a belief reſulting from proper evidence; ſo the *Evangeliſts* committed thoſe facts to writing, that they might have a like effect upon thoſe that had not been eye-witneſſes of them — *Theſe things are written that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name. John* xx. 31.

The apoſtles alſo conſtantly incouraged free inquiry, as it is natural for honeſt undeſigning men to do. It is for the intereſt of ſome to diſcourage it, and to keep people muffled up in darkneſs and ignorance, that ſo they may ſubmit to their dictates with the more readineſs and humility. Their *craft is in danger* of being detected, and their doctrine, of being exploded, as ſoon as people have ſo much preſumption as to open their eyes. Free inquiry bodes ill to the deſign which they are ingaged in; for they are ſenſible it will not be ſafe for themſelves to be *knaves* any longer than others are *fools*. But he that has nothing in view but the intereſt of truth and virtue, deſires nothing more, than that perſons would give themſelves the trouble of a free and impartial examination. Now the apoſtles knowing the goodneſs of their cauſe, and following the example of their divine Maſter, made

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it their practice to incourage liberty and freedom of thought; never intimating, as moſt of their *pretended ſucceſſors* have done, that this is hazardous to men's ſouls.

In the apoſtolic age there were many impoſtors and enthuſiaſts; falſe pretenders to inſpiration, as there are at preſent, and as there have been in almoſt every age of the chriſtian church. And for this reaſon the apoſtles directed chriſtians to examine the pretenſions of all, that ſo they might diſtinguiſh betwixt really inſpired perſons and deceivers — Thus 1 *John* iv. 1. *Beloved, believe not every ſpirit; but try the ſpirits, whether they are of God; for many falſe ſpirits are gone out into the world.* No one, ſurely, will be ſo abſurd as to ſuppoſe this was a direction to *try deceivers only*; and not *true* prophets and apoſtles. For this would ſuppoſe that they might be known one from the other, without *trying* them at all: and then no examination of either of them would be neceſſary. "Determine firſt; and then examine," is the *pleaſant* advice of ſome *grave divines*: But the apoſtles exhort us to examine all things, before we believe any thing. The *Jews* at *Berea* are celebrated, Acts xvii. 10. and onwards for not believing the apoſtles themſelves without critically examining their doctrine, and comparing it with the writings of *Moſes* and the prophets: and in the ſame paſſage, an implicit cenſure at leaſt, is paſſed upon the *Theſſalonians*, as being indolent, credulous, and too eaſy of belief. The words of the hiſtorian are theſe, *And the brethren—ſent away Paul and Silas—unto Berea; who coming there, went into the ſynagogue of the Jews. Theſe were more noble than thoſe of Theſſalonica; for they received the word with all readineſs of mind: and ſearched the ſcriptures daily whether thoſe things were ſo.* By their *receiving the word with all readineſs of mind*, nothing more is here intended, than that they gave a ready and candid attention to what *Paul* and *Silas* had to ſay: Afterwards, like prudent and rational

rational men, they examined into the truth of it. And it follows immediately in the next verſe— *Therefore many of them believed* — A natural conſequence of a free and impartial inquiry into the grounds of the *chriſtian* religion. I obſerved above, that the *Theſſalonians* are cenſured in this paſſage, for their credulity, and not uſing ſuitable precaution in receiving chriſtianity. And it is probable that the apoſtle *Paul* had a view at this incurious and over credulous humour of theirs, in his 1 Epiſtle to them, Chap. v. ver. 21. *Prove* (or examine) *all things*, ſays he ; *hold faſt that which is good.* This advice was, indeed, proper for all ; but peculiarly ſo for thoſe who were backward to examine, and forward to believe, theſe being in the greateſt danger of being ſeduced.

Again, What beſides free inquiry after truth and knowledge, does the apoſtle intend, Phil. xix. 10? *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that ye may approve things that are excellent*—(Or as ſome underſtand theſe laſt words, *that ye may try things that differ, and are controverted.*) To the ſame purpoſe are the Words of this apoſtle, *Eph.* vi. 14, 15. *That we be henceforth no more children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of men, and cunning craftineſs whereby they lye in wait to deceive : but ſpeaking the truth in love*, &c. So St. *John* cautions the *elect lady and her children*, againſt ſeducers, and deceivers—*Many deceivers are entered into the world— Look to yourſelves* — 2 *John* 7, 8. The apoſtle here alludes to thoſe deceivers *who confeſſed not that Jeſus Chriſt was come in the fleſh.* And in his *firſt* Epiſtle he cautions thoſe to whom he wrote, againſt another kind of deceivers, whoſe doctrine is equally fatal, *viz.* thoſe who taught that faith without works, denominates a man righteous—*Little children, let no man deceive you : He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous—He that committeth*

teth ſin is of the devil— 1 *John* iii. 7, 8. Thus alſo the apoſtle *Paul*, *Eph.* v. 5, 6.—*Ye know that no whore-monger*, &c. *hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Chriſt, and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for becauſe of theſe things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of diſobedience.* Do not all theſe exhortations given to chriſtians, to take care that *no man deceive* them, imply that they are to examine and judge for themſelves; and not to ſubmit implicitly to the dictates of any, even though they pretend to a commiſſion from heaven? Unleſs it be their right and duty to do thus, nothing can be more impertinent than exhortations of this kind.

ALTHOUGH the apoſtle *Paul* were an inſpired writer, yet he is far from putting on thoſe dogmatical airs which are now too common amongſt thoſe who do not pretend to inſpiration. He often condeſcends to make an appeal to the reaſon and judgment of thoſe to whom he writes, and invites them to examine what he ſays. Thus 1 *Cor.* x. 15. *I ſpeak as to wiſe men; judge ye what I ſay.* And ſo, Chap. i. ver. 12. *Judge in yourſelves, is it comely*, &c.

IN a controverſy betwixt the *jewiſh* and *gentile* converts at *Rome*, the apoſtle gave his own ſenſe concerning the point in debate: he exhorted them to mutual love and forbearance: and then, like a reaſonable, catholick man, and a friend to the rights of private judgment, he concludes—*Let every man be fully perſwaded in his own mind.* *Rom.* xvi. 5.

WHEN the *jewiſh* converts in *Galatia* (being ſtill zealouſly attached to the law of *Moſes*) were for impoſing certain opinions and practices upon the *Gentiles*, this ſame apoſtle took the part of the *latter*; and even enjoined it upon them to vindicate their religious and chriſtian rights againſt all ſuch encroachments — *Stand faſt*

faſt, ſays he, *in the liberty wherewith Chriſt has made you free* : (i. e. aſſert your freedom from the *moſaic law*, and all the old *jewiſh inſtitutions*) *and be not again intangled with any yoke of bondage.*† (i. e. ſtand up in defence of your chriſtian liberty, not only againſt theſe your judaizing brethren ; but alſo againſt all others who ſhall attempt to exerciſe any kind of ſpiritual tyranny over you.) So that it is not left to the option of chriſtians whether they will relinquiſh their natural liberty in religious matters, or not ; they are commanded to aſſert it. God has given us abilities to *judge even of ourſelves what is right* : and requires us to improve them. He forbids us to *call any man maſter upon earth.* And as he has forbidden us to ſubmit implicitly to the dictates of any man ; ſo he has alſo expreſly forbid all chriſtians to aſſume or uſurp any authority over their brethren. *Ye know*, ſays our bleſſed Saviour, *that the princes of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over them, and they that are great exerciſe authority upon them : But it ſhall not be ſo among you. But whoſoever—will be chief among you, let him be your ſervant, even as the ſon of man came not to be miniſtred unto, but to miniſter.** How does our Lord upbraid the *Scribes* and *Phariſecs*, who *ſat in Moſes's ſeat*, for aſſuming an unreaſonable authority, and affecting more honour and ſubmiſſion than was due to them ? *The Scribes and Phariſees—love the uppermoſt rooms at feaſts, and the chief ſeats in the ſynagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your maſter even Chriſt ; and all ye are brethren.* ‖ The firſt propagators of Chriſtianity carefully obſerved this prohibition. They were meek, humble and charitable. They claimed no *dominion over the faith* of Chriſtians, but were content with being *helpers of their joy*. 2 *Cor.* i. 24. They *preached not themſelves to be the Lord or Lords ; but Chriſt Jeſus ; and themſelves*

† *Gal.* v. 1. * *Matt.* xx. ‖ *Matt.* xxiii.

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the ſervants of Chriſtians for Jeſus ſake. 2. *Cor.* iv. 5. This was the manner in which the holy apoſtles demeaned themſelves in their office. But ſince their day, Eccleſiaſticks have been for leſs humility and more power. The ſtyle of *ſervants* is below their dignity: And they muſt *be called of men Lords*, *Reverend* and *Right Reverend Fathers in God*, &c. Their fellow chriſtians and brethren muſt approach them upon the bended knee; Sovereign princes muſt think themſelves honoured in having the liberty to kiſs the toe of an old *Monk*, who calls himſelf Chriſt's *Vicar*: And thus it is that the *Pope* imitates him who was *meek and lowly in heart*; and who condeſcended to *waſh his diſciples feet*.

I hope it appears from what has been ſaid, that both reaſon and ſcripture oppoſe the claims of thoſe arrogant men who love to *lord it over God's heritage*; and had rather *have dominion over our faith*, than be *helpers of our joy*: And that it is the duty of chriſtians to aſſert their right of private judgment in religious matters, in oppoſition to all that are for uſurping authority over them. I promiſed, in the next place, to conſider the principal objections againſt this doctrine. But I believe I need make no apology for deferring this to another opportunity.

I ſhall, however, beg leave, from what has been ſaid already, to look upon the point as proved; and ſo to cloſe with a few reflections ſuitable to the ſubject.

It appears, then, that all who any ways diſcourage freedom of inquiry and judgment in religious matters, are, ſo far forth as they are guilty of this, encroachers upon the natural rights of mankind; that they ſet up their own authority in oppoſition to that of almighty God; and that they are enemies to truth, and the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt.—They are encroachers upon the natural rights of mankind, becauſe it is the natural

right and priviledge of every man to make the beſt uſe he can of his own intellectual faculties—They ſet up their own authority in oppoſition to that of almighty God, becauſe God has not only given us liberty to examine and judge for ourſelves; but expreſly required us to do it—They are enemies to truth, and the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt; becauſe free examination is the way to truth, and the goſpel in particular, gains ground the faſter, the more its doctrines and evidences are examined.—While other tyrants enſlave the bodies of men, theſe throw their chains and fetters upon the mind, which (as the *Jews* ſaid of themſelves) was *born free*; and which ought not to be *in bondage to any man*: but only to the *Father of Spirits*. If it be aſked who theſe ſpiritual invaders are, it may be anſwered, all in general who ſet themſelves up to judge for their neighbours; All who are for impoſing their own opinions upon others: All who any ways diſtreſs and afflict ſuch as differ from them in their religious ſentiments: All who make uſe of any other weapons beſides thoſe of reaſon and argument, in order to demoliſh error, and propagate truth. If a man has a right to judge for himſelf, certainly no other has a right to judge for him: And to attempt it, is to ſtrike at the moſt valuable intereſt of a man conſidered as a reaſonable creature.

THOSE that are guilty of this crime in the higheſt degree, are ſuch as inflict capital puniſhments upon thoſe that embrace opinions contrary to their own. The heathens ſometimes practiſed this barbarity among themſelves before chriſtianity made its appearance in the world. Afterwards they united their force againſt the doctrine of Chriſt, as the moſt dangerous *hereſy* that had ever been heard of: and butchered millions. Scarce had they laid down the practice, when Chriſtians filled with more than pagan cruelty, took it up, and perſecuted one another: Nor is it quite laid aſide

aſide to this day in ſome parts of Chriſtendom. *The mother of harlots*, who has long *made herſelf drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jeſus*, has ſtill her *inquiſition*; and is frequently adding to the number of thoſe whom St. *John* ſaw, in his viſion, *under the altar*, while they *cried with a loud voice, ſaying—How long, O Lord, holy and true! doſt thou not judge, and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth!*

In a ſomewhat lower degree are they chargeable with the ſame crime, who puniſh *diſſenters* and *non-ſubſcribers*, by fines and impriſonments, and by depriving them of thoſe civil privileges, emoluments and honours, which, as good ſubjects and friends, to the ſtate, they might juſtly expect. It is well known in what church this inhuman practice has been carried to a prodigious length: and in which it is not yet wholly laid aſide. It is well that, not *Jeſus Chriſt*, but *another Perſon*, is ſaid to be the *ſupreme Head* of this church. For it would be abſurd to ſuppoſe, that He who ſaid his *kingdom was not of this world*, ſhould allow of any ſuch practice among the members of that body of which He is the *Head*.

Again: Another practice akin to thoſe mentioned above, and which has an apparent tendency to hinder men from judging for themſelves, is that of *Creed-making*; ſetting up human teſts of *orthodoxy*, inſtead of the infallible word of God; and making other terms of chriſtian communion than thoſe explicitly pointed out in the goſpel. For any man, or any ſet of men whatever, to do thus, is plainly to arrogate to themſelves the right of judging for their neighbours; and to deter people, as far as they are able, from ſeeing with their own eyes, and *judging even of themſelves what is right*. Indeed this practice is not ſo criminal as that of perſecuting and murthering men for their religious ſentiments: for any reaſonable man had rather

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be the object of a thouſand *anathema*'s than have his life, or even his temporal ſubſtance taken from him. But ſtill, if theſe *faith-maker*'s I am ſpeaking of are ſo compaſſionate as *only to give their brethren to the devil*, for not ſubmittting to their doctrines and decrees, even this has ſome tendency to intimidate them; eſpecially ſuch as are naturally of a weak and puſillanimous make. For when a creed is begun, or eked out with ſeveral reverend, eccleſiaſtical curſes; and when it is confidently affirmed, that *unleſs a man believe faithfully* every article contained in it, *he ſhall without doubt periſh everlaſtingly*; it cannot be ſuppoſed, that the generality of people ſhould ever have the courage to heſitate in the leaſt concerning the truth of it, although it may be really an affront to common ſenſe, a medly of nonſenſe and contradiction. Nor are there wanting innumerable inſtances of perſons, who have, in this way, been firſt frighted out of their ſenſes, and then into the belief of the groſſeſt abſurdities; and paying a ſacred regard to them under the notion of their being orthodox, ſoul ſaving truths and divine myſteries—ſuch as are not to be examined with reaſon, but to be believed and adored without it.

It is indeed pretended that all theſe different methods of keeping men from exerciſing their own rational faculties, are entered upon with a very pious and godly deſign; and with an holy zeal to keep hereſies out of the church; to reclaim thoſe that are unſound in the faith; and to preſerve the chriſtian verity pure and undefiled. But the proud, domineering, unchriſtian ſpirit that has been betrayed by theſe holy murtherers, robbers, and faith-impoſers, leaves us but little room to think that they were actuated by a real concern for the intereſts of chriſtianity, and the ſalvation of men's ſouls. However, to let alone their views and intentions which we have little or nothing to do with, theſe practices themſelves are unjuſtifiable: they are imperious and

and tyrannical: and contrary to the ſpirit and doctrines of the goſpel. They are an infringement upon thoſe rights of conſcience, which ought to be ſacred; they have an apparent tendency to prevent all improvements in religious knowledge, and to entail ignorance, error, and ſuperſtition upon future generations. What improvements can we ſuppoſe would have been made in the ſeveral arts and ſciences comparable to the preſent, had the ſtudy of them been incumbered with ſuch reſtraints, and almoſt inſuperable difficulties?

LET us ſuppoſe, for example, that ſome great *Monarch* a few centuries ago, together with the *Philoſophers* of that age, had interpoſed with their authority in the *ſciences*: Let us ſuppoſe that an *oath of ſupremacy* to the *King*, or *Queen*, had been required; and deviſed in ſuch terms as theſe—*That the King or Queen for the time being, is the ſupreme Head of the ſociety* [or *church*] *of* Philoſophers——*Veſted with all power to exerciſe all manner of* philoſophical *diſcipline*: *And other* philoſophical *perſons have no manner of juriſdiction* philoſophical, *but by and under the King's or Queen's moſt Excellent Majeſty*; *who hath full power and authority to hear and determine all manner of cauſes* philoſophical, *and to reform and correct all* philoſophical *errors, hereſies, enormities and abuſes whatſoever, within his, or her realm.* Let us ſuppoſe farther that *philoſophical creeds and articles of faith* had been compoſed, and authoritatively iſſued out with certain *minatory* and *damnatory* clauſes; and that they had been regiſtred among the *other laws of the land.* Let us ſuppoſe farther, that *philoſophical courts* had been erected, where *hereticks in philoſophy*, and all *non-ſubſcribers to the philoſophy by law eſtabliſhed*, were to be arraigned, haraſſed, fined, whipt, hanged or burnt. I ſay, if ſuch meaſures as theſe had been entred upon a few centuries ago, muſt we not ſuppoſe that they would have been very abſurd and injurious?

jurious ? Muſt we not ſuppoſe alſo, that they would have damped the greateſt and moſt enterprizing *Geni-us*'s ; and ſo have been a means of keeping the world in ignorance ? Would not this have prevented thoſe valuable improvements in natural knowledge, which the world is bleſt with at preſent ? Had ſuch methods been taken ſeaſonably, might it not have been *Hereſy* ſtill, to think this earth a *globe ?* to deny that the ſun *revolves* about us once every twenty-four hours ? or to queſtion the *equality* of the ſun and moon ? And might not the *orthodox* philoſophy at this day, have poſſibly been that concerning the *great cow* and *tortoiſe*, &c ? In ſhort, we cannot think of ſupporting and propagating the ſciences, by dint of *authority*, without ſmiling. And it is equally ridiculous to attempt to propagate religious knowledge and the doctrines of the goſpel, by *authority*. And every one that pleaſes may eaſily ſee what attempts of this nature have uſually iſſued in ; and what muſt neceſſarily be the effect of them, viz. *ignorance* and *hypocriſy*. Error, as well as *iniquity*, may be *eſtabliſhed by a law*. And when it is ſo, a man muſt either ſubſcribe to it, contrary to his ſentiments ; or ſeriouſly embrace it for truth : A ſad dilemma ! when a man is thus forced to be a knave or a fool ! Mankind in general ſeem to be quite indolent enough, backward enough to examine into moral and religious ſubjects, without thoſe unnatural reſtraints which are put upon them by the ſetting up of authority in matters of faith. There are indeed ſome fooliſh and conceited men who take a pleaſure in being ſingular in their opinions ; and who never ſuppoſe they *think freely enough*, till they are run *wild* and *mad* ; and have rejected every thing that others have believed before. But theſe inſtances are not frequent. Men are generally too prone to follow the multitude, to embrace implicitly the tenets of their *ſpiritual inſtructors*, their *fore-fathers*, their *good mothers and nurſes* ;

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and to fall in with the opinions of the rich and powerful, which is the road to wealth and preferment. And there is really much more need of incouraging freedom of thought, and an inquiſitive turn of mind, by handſome gratuities ; than there is of keeping people in the old beaten track by the terror of penal laws, gibbets, inquiſitions, *ſpiritual* courts, and *carnal* curſes. Whatever is pretended, theſe compulſive methods were not thoſe by which *the truth as it is in Jeſus*, was at firſt propagated and defended : neither can they be of any ſervice to the cauſe of truth and religion at preſent. A pecuniary mulct may impoveriſh a man in this world ; but it cannot make him *rich in faith*, and an *heir of the Kingdom* —— The rack may torture his limbs ; but it cannot draw out the ſting from a guilty conſcience.——A dark and filthy dungeon may throw us into a mortal diſtemper ; but it cannot bring light and health into our minds, and make our *ſouls proſper*—— A burning faggot may ſet our bodies in a light blaze ; but it has no tendency to illuminate the underſtanding. To attempt to *dragoon* men into ſound orthodox *Chriſtians*, is as unnatural and fruitleſs as to attempt to *dragoon* them into good *poets*, *phyſicians* or *mathematicians*. A blow with a club may fracture a man's ſkull ; but I ſuppoſe he will not think and reaſon the more clearly for that ; though he may poſſibly believe the more *orthodoxly*, according to the opinions of ſome. And upon this account it muſt be confeſſed that thoſe who make uſe of theſe methods to propagate their ſentiments, act very prudently : for their doctrines are generally ſuch as are much more readily embraced by a man after his brains are knocked out, than while he continues in his ſenſes, and of a ſound mind.

I ſhall conclude with the words of the apoſtle *Paul* to *Timothy*, in which he points out the method of defending and propagating the doctrines of the goſpel

goſpel —— *The ſervant of the Lord*, ſays he, *muſt not ſtrive; but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach; patient; in meekneſs, inſtructing thoſe that oppoſe themſelves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.*

SERMON

SERMON IV.

Objections conſidered.

LUKE XII. 54——57.

And he ſaid alſo to the people, When ye ſee a cloud riſe out of the weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, There cometh a ſhower; and ſo it is.

And when ye ſee the ſouth wind blow, ye ſay, There will be heat; and it cometh to paſs.

Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth: but how is it, that ye do not diſcern this time?

Yea, and why even of your ſelves judge ye not what is right?

HAVING, in the preceeding diſcourſe, proved the right and duty of free inquiry and private judgment in matters of religion, by direct and plain arguments both from reaſon and revelation, there was, perhaps, no occaſion for my exerciſing your patience any further, by entering upon a conſideration of the *objections* that have been raiſed againſt this Doctrine. For no objections can ſignify any thing againſt a doctrine once proved true in fact: However, ſince ſome men may think themſelves ill uſed, unleſs their arguments are diſtinctly conſidered, I ſhall devote the following hour to examine the principal objections againſt the

of the foregoing diſcourſe, ſetting them in the ſtrongeſt point of light I am able. The ſpiritual tyrants and lordly bigots of the earth have indeed *triumphed glorioufly*, as though they had gained a mighty victory over freedom of thought, *their old and mortal enemy*; and laid her *bleeding* and *gaſping* at their feet. But whether theſe are the triumphs of *real heroes*, or only the vain *gaſconades* and *Te Deums* of *imaginary conquerors*, will, perhaps, be eaſy to determine, when we come to take a view of their *weapons*, and to ſee the manner in which they have employed them.

I ſhall not have much regard to order and method in propoſing the objections now to be conſidered; but mention them juſt as they preſent themſelves to my mind. And, in the *firſt* place, it may be objected,

1. "THAT God himſelf under the *moſaic diſpenſa-*
"*tion*, required that *idolaters*, and *diſſenters from the*
"*eſtabliſhed church*, ſhould be puniſhed with death."
From hence it may be argued, "That uncontrouled
"liberty in religious matters ought not to be allowed
"of; but the *true church* is obliged in duty to reſtrain
"and correct infidels and ſchiſmaticks; and all in ge-
"neral that ſhe judges unſound in the faith."

To this it may be anſwered,

1ſt. THAT we cannot argue from what was lawful under the *jewiſh* œconomy, to what is lawful ſince that is aboliſhed, and ſuperſeded by another ſo different from it as the *chriſtian*. There might be, and doubtleſs were, ſome peculiar reaſons for authorizing and enjoining ſuch a *diſcipline* then, which do not take place at preſent. This might be as peculiar to *Judaiſm* as *circumciſion*, or the *ſacrificing* of beaſts, &c. And in reality it does not any more follow from the *Jews* being commanded

to

to extirpate idolaters, that chriſtians may deſtroy heathens and hereticks, than it does from *Abraham*'s being commanded to ſacrifice his *ſon*, that all *parents* may and ought to ſacrifice their *children* now.

It is to be remembred, that *Judaiſm* was at leaſt as much a *political* as a *religious* inſtitution. The *Jews* had God for their immediate *king* and *lawgiver*, both in *church* and *ſtate*. Their *civil* and *eccleſiaſtical* polity were blended together; and being derived from the ſame ſource, every violation of the law of *Moſes* might be conſidered and puniſhed as an offence againſt the ſtate, in a greater or leſs degree: And *idolatry* being in theſe circumſtances equivalent to *high treaſon*, it is not ſtrange that a capital puniſhment ſhould be annexed to it. But the caſe is much altered ſince the promulgation of the chriſtian religion. Chriſt's kingdom is not at all *a kingdom of this world*. It is wholly a religious inſtitution. The laws, the penalties, the rewards of it, are wholly of a ſpiritual nature: And men are to be won over to it, and kept in it, only by ſpiritual and moral means.

But 2dly, If the *true church* ought to puniſh ſuch as ſhe looks upon to be erroneous, heretical or ſchiſmatical, then a war muſt immediately commence in *Chriſtendom*; and continue 'till all are deſtroyed, but one party: For each ſect thinks itſelf in the right; and that all the reſt are tinctured with hereſy: This muſt certainly be the conſequence of this maxim, that the right of uſing violence and perſecution is the prerogative of the true church; which one would think ſufficient to convince any reaſonable man, that the maxim is falſe. Beſides, from whence comes this doctrine, that true orthodox chriſtians have a right to perſecute hereticks and unbelievers? (i. e. to be *more wicked* and *immoral* than hereticks and unbelievers?) The ſcripture, indeed, (and experience very often) teaches us, that *thoſe who will live godly in Chriſt Jeſus*,

Jeſus, muſt ſuffer perſecution ; but not, that they muſt *perſecute others.*

BUT perhaps it will be objected in the *ſecond* place,

2. " THAT our Lord himſelf required his apoſtles to " uſe external force, in order to bring men over to the " true faith, if gentler methods failed of ſucceſs." The objection will be taken from the *parable of the ſupper*, *Luke* 14. When the gueſts that were bidden, refuſed the invitation, the maſter of the feaſt is repreſented as ſaying to his ſervant, ver. 23. *Go out into the high ways and hedges, and* compel *them to come in, that my houſe may be filled.* " Now as the ſervant was commanded to " *compel* the gueſts to come to the ſupper, ſo the apo- " ſtles were injoined to uſe external violence, if neceſſa- " ry, in order to bring men over to a belief of the goſ- " pel ; from whence it follows that men are not left to " their freedom in religious matters." The

1ſt THING I would obſerve with relation to this objection is, that great caution is neceſſary in the application of parables and allegories, leſt the ſimilitude ſhould be carried farther than was originally intended. Nor is it by any means ſafe to build ſuch a doctrine, (or rather ſuch a practice) as that of compulſion in religious matters, but upon the moſt plain and expreſs command.

2dly, THIS parable, at moſt, only authorizes the compelling of *infidels* to embrace the goſpel : And ſo it has nothing to do with the controverſies amongſt the different ſects of chriſtians.

3dly, ALTHOUGH it ſhould be allowed, that this parable injoined the *inſpired* apoſtles to compel men, by external violence, to embrace chriſtianity, it will not follow that *uninſpired* men ſince, men who have no commiſſion *immediately* from heaven, have a right to do the ſame.

4thly,

4thly, It is to be obſerved, that, according to the parable, the perſons to be compelled are not the *ſame* who had before obſtinately rejected the kind invitation given them; but ſuch as had not yet been ſent to. For when the maſter ſends out his ſervant a ſecond time, to compel people to *come in*, it follows— *For I ſay unto you that thoſe men who were bidden, ſhall not taſte of my ſupper.* So that even according to this parable, thoſe who will not be perſwaded by gentle methods, are to be given over, and not to have any farther means uſed with them. From whence it follows,

5thly, That none at all are to be compelled by external violence: for we cannot ſuppoſe that force ſhould be applied firſt of all; and before other methods prove ineffectual, if at all.

6thly, Either the apoſtles did not underſtand this as a command to uſe violence in propagating chriſtianity, or they neglected to obey it; neither of which can be ſuppoſed, had there really been ſuch a command. They never attempted to uſe force; but declared, on the contrary, that *the weapons of their warfare were not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of ſtrong holds*, &c. 2 *Cor.* x. 4.

7thly, That this cannot be the ſenſe of the parable, appears from hence, that it is, in the nature of the thing, impoſſible to *force* men really to believe the goſpel, and become good chriſtians, though one had more *dragoons* to employ in this *pious work*, than *Louis* the XIVth ſent to convert the *Hugonots*. Faith and repentance are the work of *reaſon* and the *ſpirit* of God; and cannot be wrought in a man by a *cudgel*, a *ſword*, or a *gallows*.

8thly, Were this in itſelf poſſible, how could twelve *unarmed* apoſtles, who were allowed to carry only a *ſtaff* with

with them in their journies, convert the whole world by force of arms ?

9thly, And *laſtly* ; After all the flouriſh that has been made with this paſſage by *Roman-Catholicks*, and *popiſh Proteſtants*, the word we render *compel*, as often ſignifies a *moral*, as a *phyſical* compulſion. And the ſubject here ſpoken of, neceſſarily determines it to ſuch a ſignification in this place. It is as if the *maſter of the feaſt* had ſaid to his ſervant, " Since the perſons before invited to my " ſupper, [the *Jews*] refuſe to come, go to others, [the " *Gentile* nations] and give them the ſame invitation : " And uſe the greateſt importunity with them ; reaſon " with them, exhort and perſwade them ; uſe all ra- " tional methods to convince them, and bring them " in."

But I muſt proceed to another objection : And perhaps one may be urged in ſome ſuch manner as this—

3. " If every man is allowed to think and judge for " himſelf, the conſequence will be that many will fall " into erroneous and hurtful opinions. This doctrine " opens a door for hereſies to enter into the church : it " gives men a liberty to trample upon all our creeds and " confeſſions of faith ; to depart from the doctrines of " their pious fore-fathers ; and to deſpiſe their ſpiritual " guides. And what will this iſſue in, but the over- " throw of all religion." To this objection I would anſwer,

1ſt. That it does not follow from men's being at liberty to judge for themſelves, and to chuſe their own religion, that they are at liberty to judge wrong, and to reject the true religion, let it be what it will. If they are obliged to judge and chuſe, for themſelves at all, they are obliged to judge truly and juſtly, and to reject only what is wrong. The right of private judgmen

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does not imply, that it is indifferent whether a man judges truly, or not, any more than a man's right of diſpoſing of his own property, implies that he may as innocently ſquander it away in rioting and drunkenneſs, as pay his debts with it, or appropriate it to charitable uſes. As a man has not a right to do what is wrong with his own ſubſtance, ſo neither has he any, to judge wrong with his own underſtanding. He is under a moral obligation to reject error, and to embrace truth, as far as he is able to detect the former, and to diſcern the latter.

2dly, As the right of private judgment, does not leave men at liberty to judge wrong, and to embrace a falſe religion; ſo neither has the exerciſing that right any tendency to miſlead men, as the objection ſuppoſes. The tendency of it is directly the contrary way. Free examination, weighing arguments *for*, and *againſt*, with impartiality, is the way to find the truth. Who imagines that free inquiry into philoſophical ſubjects, has any tendency to lead men into a wrong idea of the natural world? No one was ever ſo infatuated as to aſſert this. And it is in all reſpects as improbable, that free enquiry into religious ſubjects ſhould lead us into wrong notions concerning the moral world. One would think that a man who had received his religious principles upon mature and deliberate conſideration, and ſo had in his own mind rational arguments to ſupport them, could not have the leaſt apprehenſion of their ſuffering any thing by being thoroughly ſcanned and examined to the bottom. Error and impoſture fly from the light, like the *owl* and *bat*: But truth and honeſty, like the noble *eagle*, face to the ſun. The cauſe of error and ſuperſtition may ſuffer by a critical examination; its ſecurity is to lurk in the dark: But the true religion flouriſhes the more, the more people exerciſe their right of private judgment. This is apparent: And therefore it is no uncharitableneſs to ſuppoſe, that all who are backward to have their doctrines called in queſtion, and to ſtand a

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fair trial at the bar of impartial reaſon, have at leaſt ſome ſecret ſuſpicion in their own minds, that they will not ſtand the teſt, and *come forth as gold when it is tried*, but be found no better than *droſs*. We pay but a bad compliment to our religion, when we cry out that it is in danger, if men are left to the free exerciſe of their own rational faculties in judging of it. A man that is conſcious his cauſe at court is good, chuſes it ſhould be tried by the moſt ſevere and critical eye. But he that either knows, or ſuſpects, he has a dirty one, had much rather that people would ſpare themſelves the trouble of examining into its merits, and take his own word for the goodneſs of it. But

3dly, As to the lamentable havock which the objection ſuppoſes will be made amongſt our *creeds* and *formularies*, if the doctrine of free inquiry ſhould prevail; this is, doubtleſs, a very natural conſequence: for this would probably prove fatal, at leaſt to many articles contained in them. For it is plain that many of them are ſtuffed with the moſt ridiculous jargon, and are as contrary to ſcripture, as they are to common ſenſe. But this, inſtead of being an objection againſt free inquiry, is one of the ſtrongeſt arguments for it. If theſe creeds and formularies were true, agreeable to reaſon and revelation, the more thoroughly they are examined the better; for then their truth would appear: But if they are falſe, it is ſtill beſt they ſhould be examined, in order to their being exploded. It is no matter how *old*, or how *new* they are. Truth does not die with age, and then revive again, as is fabled of the *phænix*: it flouriſhes in immortal youth. Error may indeed become *venerable* and *gray-headed* with length of time: but a falſhood of a thouſand years ſtanding, remains as much a falſhood as ever, although it may have been conſecrated by the church, and tranſmitted to poſterity in a creed. Whatever truths it may have had to *keep it company*; and however it may have been preſerved amidſt the

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ſtorms that have beat upon the church, it is only like one of *Noah*'s *unclean beaſts* preſerved in the *ark*, amongſt thoſe of a pure, and more uſeful nature. There is nothing more fooliſh and ſuperſtitious than a veneration for *ancient* creeds and doctrines, *as ſuch*; and nothing more unworthy a reaſonable creature, than to value *principles* by their *age*, as ſome do their *wines*. But, indeed, this is as common as it is ridiculous. With many people, "Antiquity! Antiquity! Antiquity!" is the cry: And, "Who will be ſo hardy as to diſpute the "truth of what was believed a thouſand years ago?" Juſt as if what was falſe formerly, were not ſo ſtill; but might be ripened and refined by age into a *doctrine of grace*. Moſt things are, indeed, changed by *time*. *Time* makes the child a man: *Time* makes the ignorant wife: *Time* often turns a friend into a foe, and a foe into a friend: *The faſhion of the world paſſeth away* by *time*: And *time* ſhall change the whole face of nature. But truth, like the *Father of lights*, is without *variableneſs*, or *ſhadow of turning*.

To proceed,

4thly, It is ſuppoſed in the laſt mentioned objection, that freedom of inquiry will naturally bring our *ſpiritual guides* into contempt, and weaken their authority. To this I reply, That it cannot poſſibly be of any diſadvantage to the ſober and rational part of the *clergy*; but has a tendency to make them more eſteemed. But as to the vain and proud; the ignorant and aſſuming; the enthuſiaſtic and ſuperſtitious; it has doubtleſs a natural tendency to bring theſe into contempt: And the ſooner the better, that ſo they may not have ſo much power to do miſchief. Theſe are the perſons that are generally the moſt averſe to people's ſeeing and judging for themſelves: And the reaſon why they are ſo, is too apparent to need mentioning. But

5thly, And *laſtly*, Upon ſuppoſition that the cauſe of truth and real religion, might ſuffer in ſome reſpects, by perſons exerciſing their right of private judgment; yet this is no juſt reaſon for denying them ſuch a liberty. This right is given them by God and nature, and the goſpel of Chriſt: And no man has a right to deprive another of it, under a notion that he will make an ill uſe of it, and fall into erroneous opinions. We may as well pick our neighbour's pocket, for fear he ſhould ſpend his money in debauchery, as take from him his right of judging for himſelf, and chuſing his religion, for fear he ſhould judge amiſs and abuſe his liberty.

But I muſt haſten to another objection, which is frequently urged with a great deal of confidence, and very little reaſon. It is near akin to that laſt mentioned; and may be put into ſome ſuch form as this,

4. "If all are left at liberty to chuſe their own religion, and to enjoy it unmoleſted, we ſhall have innumerable *ſects* ſpringing up amongſt us; which tends to *confuſion*, and deſtroys the *peace* and *unity of the church*. It is therefore expedient that the *governors of the church* ſhould injoin upon all, the belief of certain articles of faith, and the obſervation of certain modes and rites of worſhip. Without ſome common rule of faith, worſhip and diſcipline, beyond what the ſcriptures contain, there can be no ſufficient bond of union amongſt chriſtians. And ſo the church muſt inevitably be crumbled to pieces; whereas there ought to be *no ſchiſm in that ſpiritual body*."

With relation to this objection I would obſerve,

1ſt. That if any rule of faith, worſhip and diſcipline, beſides that which our Saviour and his apoſtles have left us, be neceſſary in order to the peace and good government of the church, then the church had no peace

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and was not well governed during the apoſtolic age. For chriſtians had then no common rule of faith, worſhip and diſcipline beſides that which they received from our Lord himſelf, or his apoſtles, who were under the extraordinary influence and direction of his ſpirit. Which rule is tranſmitted to us in the writings of the new teſtament; and is ſufficient *now*, for the regulation of the church, if it was *then*. That this was ſufficient then, is not denied; and therefore it cannot be deficient at preſent. But

2dly, If any farther regulations had been neceſſary in order to preſerve the peace and unity of the church, it is ſtrange that neither our bleſſed Saviour, who *loved the church and gave himſelf for it*, nor the apoſtles, who liv'd and dy'd in the ſervice of the church, ſhould have taken more care to provide for its peace and proſperity. Can we ſuppoſe that they did their work to the halves, and left others to finiſh and perfect it?

3dly, Who gave the governors of the church, any authority in matters of faith, worſhip and diſcipline? Do we find one word of it in ſcripture? No. The church of Chriſt, as ſuch, has no legiſlator beſides Chriſt himſelf, whom the Father *has made head over all things to the church*. And whatever church that be, whoſe rulers have any power of legiſlation, ſo far forth it is not the church of Chriſt. For Chriſt equally forbids all his diſciples to aſſume authority over their brethren; and to ſubmit to any who ſhall arrogate to themſelves any authority in matters of a religious concern.

4thly, and laſtly, As no order of men has any authority to enjoin the belief of any articles of faith; or the uſe of any modes of worſhip, not expreſly and explicitly pointed out in the ſcriptures; ſo neither has the enjoining any ſuch, a tendency to preſerve the peace and harmony of the church; but directly the contrary. The confuſion

confuſion and diſorder that have hitherto been in the church, have not ariſen from chriſtians exerciſing their own judgment, and worſhipping God according to their conſciences; (though in a manner ſomewhat different from others) but from the pride and inſolence of thoſe who deny their chriſtian brethren this liberty; and who undertake to preſcribe authoritatively to others what they ſhall believe, and how they ſhall worſhip. Were it not for the turbulent, domineering ſpirit of ſomeEccleſiaſticks, who deſire more power than Chriſt ſaw fit to intruſt them with, there would be but little of that wrangling and diſcord which have hitherto diſturbed the peace of the church. The diviſions and contentions that have hitherto happened, and ſtill ſubſiſt in the chriſtian church, are all, in a manner, owing to the unchriſtian temper and conduct of thoſe who could not content themſelves with *ſcripture orthodoxy*, with the ſimple and *ſpiritual worſhip of the Father*, enjoined by our Saviour, and with the *platform of church diſcipline* contained in the new teſtament; but muſt go to coining new articles of faith, new modes and rites of worſhip, making new canons, and preſcribing new rules for the regulation of the church. It is about theſe comparatively novel inventions, that the governors and *fathers of the church*, (as ſome affect to call them) have generally been more warm and zealous, than about an holy and godly life. They have ordinarily given pretty good quarter to the moſt vicious and debauched of men, provided their own authority was acknowledged; their own peculiar whimſies embraced; and their *decent* (or rather ridiculous) *forms* and *ceremonies* were religiouſly obſerved. But the moſt peaceable, ſober and virtuous perſons, who would not ſubmit to their tyrannical yoke, have all along been treated with contempt and inhumanity, as being hereticks, ſciſmaticks, &c. And all this, perhaps only for not practiſing ſuch rites, as have no more relation to chriſtianity than *telling beeds*, or *cracking the fingers*; and for not believing ſuch doctrines as have

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no more to do with the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, than the idle ſtories of *bell and the dragon*, or *Tobit and his dog*. Here is the true ſource of religious diſcord. Had Eccleſiaſticks, inſtead of *lording it our God's heritage*, and ſetting up their own authority in the room of Chriſt's, put on *the meekneſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt*; and ſet a better *example to the flock*; had they endeavoured to remove all *ſtumbling blocks* out of the way, inſtead of inſiſting upon indifferent things as neceſſary terms of chriſtian communion; had they taught and practiſed *the weightier matters of law*, inſtead of ſpending their zeal upon trifles; had they taught mutual forbearance and charity, inſtead of fomenting a furious party ſpirit, and exciting ignorant bigots to rail at ſober peaceable chriſtians; had they done thus, the peace and harmony of the church might have been very well preſerved, without *creeds* and *formularies*, or an exact uniformity in faith and worſhip. Our bleſſed Saviour and his apoſtles, it is plain, have left matters ſo that there may be a conſiderable latitude and difference in the ſentiments of good chriſtians, and in the manner of their worſhip. But *His* ambaſſadors, and *their* ſucceſſors, it ſeems, have found out that this is a great defect. Accordingly they undertake to ſupply it, under the notion of preſerving the peace of the church. And this is what has hitherto been, and muſt continue to be, the cauſe of angry debates and endleſs contentions; a means of dividing the church, inſtead of uniting it; and of inſpiring chriſtians with mutual rage, inſtead of mutual love and brotherly affection.

It may be objected, in the *fifth* place,

5. "That the doctrine of private judgment is inconſiſtent with that of a ſtanding miniſtry in the chriſtian church, appointed by Chriſt to inſtruct people in religious matters. An order of men was divinely inſtituted to do the office of *inſtructors*, or *teachers* in the church:

" church: Conſequently there muſt be others whoſe " duty it is to *learn of them*, and not to pretend to a " right of judging for themſelves. It is incumbent " upon the *Laiety* to go to their ſpiritual guides; and " to receive their inſtructions with humility and rever- " ence, without pretending to diſpute the truth of what " they aſſert in the name of the Lord." This, we know, is the manner in which many expreſs themſelves upon this ſubject. And the poſitive, dogmatical air with which moſt of our pulpit-diſcourſes are delivered is a ſufficient proof, that theſe ſentiments are adopted by the generality of thoſe that ſtile themſelves the *ambaſſadors of Jeſus Chriſt*. But to this objection it may be anſwered in the firſt place,

1ſt. THAT, allowing there is ſomewhere in the chriſtian church, a ſet of Men whoſe office it is to teach authoritatively, and by divine right, ſtill people muſt judge for themſelves *who theſe men are*. Almoſt all publick teachers of religion pretend a divine right to be ſo. But they do not all teach the ſame doctrines. How then ſhall we know whom to chuſe for our ſpiritual inſtructor, without examining into, and judging upon, the claims of thoſe who demand our attention, and the direction of our underſtandings and conſciences? But

2ly. SUPPOSING we have found who theſe perſons are, to whom this authority is given, it does not follow that they are to be *implicitly* believed in every thing they ſay, or even in any thing. No man is to be believed implicitly, unleſs he is infallible: but infallibility is not neceſſarily connected with a divine right to teach. Although it ſhould be allowed, that kings reign by divine right, in the higheſt ſenſe pleaded for by the advocates for *paſſive obedience* and *non-reſiſtence*, ſtill it is poſſible that they may make an ill uſe of their power; command things expreſly forbidden by God, and forbid what God has injoined. In either of theſe caſes, it will be allowed that

that they have no title to the active obedience of their ſubjects. So alſo, he that has a divine right to inſtruct others in religion, may poſſibly ſpeak falſe, either ignorantly or with deſign: And if he does ſo, no one will be ſo extravagant as to ſay, that he ought to be believed. God has given him a right to teach; but it is only to teach truth; if, therefore, he *teaches for doctrines the commandments of men*, and lies, for the goſpel of Chriſt, he exceeds his commiſſion; and has no more right to demand our aſſent, than any other liar, or deceiver who is *unconſecrated*. So that let us carry our idea of the authority of chriſtian teachers ever ſo high, yet if we ſtop ſhort of infallibity, we are in reaſon obliged to examine all that they ſay, and either to receive or reject it, as evidence of its truth does, or does not appear. Even the apoſtles themſelves (who were divinely authorized teachers in a much higher and more proper ſenſe than any ſet of men can pretend to be at this day) never pretended to ſuch a right of dictating to others what they ſhould believe and do, as interfered with the right of private judgment. Chriſtian teachers in after ages are (or at leaſt ought to be) only *commentators* upon the ſcriptures: and we cannot ſuppoſe their *commentaries* have greater weight and authority than the *text* itſelf.

A man of ſuperior knowledge and integrity may be of great advantage in a chriſtian ſociety, by helping his brethren and neighbours to a right underſtanding of the ſcriptures, although he be not infallible, and although nothing he advances is to be received for truth without examination and proof. We have *authorized* profeſſors and teachers of *law*, *phyſic*, *philoſophy*, &c. who are doubtleſs helpful to ſuch as devote themſelves to the ſtudy of theſe ſciences. But who ever imagined that the end of their inſtitution was authoritatively to dictate what is true in their reſpective provinces, in ſuch a ſenſe as to preclude examination; and to render it unneceſſary for their pupils and auditors to inquire into the foundation

tion of what they aſſert? This is ſo far from being the caſe, that 'tis confeſſed their chief buſineſs is to open and enlarge the minds of their ſcholars; to propoſe reaſons and arguments to their underſtandings, and to endeavour to make them apprehend their force; and in this way to bring them acquainted with the ſciences to which they reſpectively apply themſelves. A *mathematician* would think his pupil had made but a ſmall proficiency, if he only believed upon *authority*, all the propoſitions in *Euclid*, and other books of the ſame kind, without ſeeing what principles they were grounded upon, or being able to demonſtrate them himſelf. And as the buſineſs of an inſtructor is not to inforce certain dogma's purely by dint of authority; ſo the buſineſs of a learner is not to receive for truth whatever his inſtructor in any ſcience advances as ſuch; but to exerciſe his own intellectual powers, and to enter into the reaſons and grounds of what is taught, and to receive nothing without evidence. No one imagines that a perſon's exerciſing his own underſtanding in this manner, is inconſiſtent with the notion of his having ſomebody to lead and inſtruct him in any branch of natural knowledge. And the caſe is much the ſame in morals and religion. A man's being an authorized (if you pleaſe, a *divinely* authorized) inſtructor in religious matters, is no ways inconſiſtent with the right of private judgment in others. Indeed if they reject the truth when it is ſufficiently proved, they do it at their peril; and that, let it be offered by whom it will. But ſtill all are left at as much liberty to examine and judge for themſelves, as if there were no public teachers at all.

I proceed now to the *ſixth*, and laſt objection I ſhall have time to conſider. The objection I intend may be put into ſome ſuch form as this—

6. "ALTHOUGH men may be at liberty to judge "for themſelves, and to chuſe their own religion, when the

" the *civil magiſtrate* does not interpoſe with his autho-
" rity ; yet when articles of faith have once received a
" royal ſanction ; and a particular religion is eſtabliſh-
" ed by the laws of the land ; then certainly we are
" bound to diſmiſs all our former ſcruples of conſcience,
" and to ſubmit to the *religion of the ſtate.* For the a-
" poſtle has told us expreſly, That *the powers that be,*
" *are ordained of God, that he that reſiſteth the power, re-*
" *ſiſteth the ordinance of God, and ſhall receive to himſelf*
" *damnation.*"

With reſpect to this objection, I would beg leave to query in the *firſt* place, whether chriſtians are bound in conſcience to believe and conform to that religion, whatever it be, which is eſtabliſhed by law, in the countries where they reſpectively live ? This is a plain queſtion : and they either are, or are not ſo obliged. There is no medium. If they are not ſo obliged, but only in caſe they apprehend the eſtabliſhed religion is agreeable to the word and will of God, this ſuppoſes a right of private judgment, and ſo gives up the whole point in debate. But on the other hand, if they are bound in conſcience to conform in the manner before expreſſed, from hence it follows, that he that lives in *Scotland* is bound in conſcience to be a *Preſbyterian* ; he that lives in *England* to be an *Epiſcopalian* ; he that lives in *Italy*, *France*, *Spain* or *Portugal* to be a *Roman Catholick* ; he that lives in *Conſtantinople* muſt be a *Mahometan* ; and he that lives in a *Heathen* country, muſt conſcientiouſly comply with all the idolatrous rites that are injoined by the civil authority ; and ſo be an *Heathen* in order to obey the *goſpel-precept* concerning ſubmiſſion to lawful authority. Moreover, upon this ſuppoſition, it follows that a traveller who has occaſion to paſs through all thoſe different countries, muſt change his religion with his climate. He muſt be ſucceſſively a *Presbyterian*, *Epiſcopalian*, *Papiſt*, *Muſſulman*, and a *Heathen* ; and then be a good *orthodox* believer when he comes into *Chriſtendom* again.

Theſe conſequences are unavoidable upon ſuppoſition that the ſubject ought univerſally to embrace the religion of the ſupreme magiſtrate. And ſome men will not be ſhocked at theſe conſequences; for nothing pleaſes them better than to change their religion as often as they can with conveniency and profit; oaths and ſubſcriptions are, with them, of no ſignification; if they *ſwear to their own hurt*, it is but to *change*. They are governed by the faſhion in their religion, as much as they are in the cut of their cloaths; they have none but a ſtate conſcience; and either rail or ſmile at thoſe who are ſo whimſical and ſuperſtitious as to pretend to have any other. What they have to do in order to know the true religion, is not to inquire into the nature of things, and the infallible oracles of God, but to ſearch the *Codes* and *Regiſters* and *Law-books* in the country where they live. However it is to be hoped that ſome others do not trifle with their Maker in this manner; but think it of ſome importance to know the will of God; and to obey it conſcientiouſly, whatever may be the religion by law eſtabliſhed. Is it not poſſible for the command of the civil magiſtrate to interfere and claſh with the laws of God? No man will pretend to deny this. Whoſe authority, then is to be regarded, that of the King, or that of the Monarch of the univerſe, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Will any man ſay it is not our buſineſs as men, and eſpecially as chriſtians, to judge whether the injunctions of the civil magiſtrate may be complied with conſiſtently with our allegiance and loyalty to the ſupreme Majeſty of heaven and earth? And if they cannot, will any one make it a ſerious queſtion, *whether it is better to obey God or man?* But

2dly. I would humbly inquire how any civil majeſtrate came by any authority at all in religious matters; and *who gave him this authority?* Has the ſupreme magiſtrate of every nation, as ſuch, a right to make a religion for his ſubjects? No. For then a heathen magiſtrate, would have

have a right to enjoin idolatry and paganiſm; and to puniſh all chriſtians that came within his territories, if they would not conform. Does the goſpel of Chriſt give the chriſtian magiſtrate authority in matters of faith and worſhip? No. It ſays not a word about any ſuch thing. But

3dly. And laſtly here, It is evident beyond all diſpute, that the apoſtle in injoining obedience to the civil magiſtrate, had no thought of injoining obedience to him in religious matters. For all the ſupreme magiſtrates then in the world were Pagan; and idolatry was the religion by law eſtabliſhed. And certainly we cannot ſuppoſe that the apoſtles could injoin it as a chriſtian duty to embrace the eſtabliſhed religion, when that was directly oppoſite to Chriſtianity. To have threatned damnation to thoſe who diſobeyed in this caſe, would have been to threaten damnation to themſelves, and to denounce an anathema againſt all the chriſtians in the world, and even againſt Jeſus Chriſt himſelf; for theſe were all diſſenters from the eſtabliſhed religion; and thouſands glorioufly ſuffered martyrdom, for refuſing to comply with the religion of the ſtate, and for aſſerting that right of private judgment which we are now endeavouring to defend.

According to St. *Paul*, the magiſtrate is *ordained of God for a terror to evil doers; and for a praiſe to them that do well.* His office is to preſerve the liberties and natural rights of his ſubjects, one of the moſt important of which rights is that of private judgment, and an unmoleſted enjoyment of a man's own religion, let it be what it will, provided he is a peaceable ſubject, and a good member of ſociety. Theſe and ſuch like are the ends for which, according to ſcripture, the magiſtrate is ordained of God, and not to make a religion for his ſubjects. This would be to invade, and incroach upon, thoſe natural rights of his ſubjects, which

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it is his buſineſs to preſerve inviolable. As the Jews ſaid occaſionally to *Pilate*, *We have no king but Cæſar*; ſo chriſtians, as ſuch, may ſay, *We have no king but Jeſus Chriſt*: And they are *traitors* to him their lawful ſovereign if they ſwear allegiance to any other as the lord of their faith, and the director of their religious conduct. And indeed the very mention of *articles of faith eſtabliſhed by law*, is as great a ſoleciſm as *mathematicks eſtabliſhed by law*; and deſerves a worſe name than I chuſe to give in this place.

THUS I have endeavoured with all poſſible brevity and plainneſs to anſwer the moſt material objections againſt freedom of thought, and the rights of conſcience in religious concerns. I have aimed at provoking no ſect of chriſtians whatever; nor at pleaſing any; but have ſpoken my ſentiments, ſuch as they are, with the honeſt ſimplicity that I think becomes a chriſtian: And with ſuch *freedom* as I apprehend is agreable to the cauſe I have been attempting to defend; the cauſe of *religious liberty*; that liberty which God and the goſpel of his Son have granted to us; that liberty, for the ſake of which our pious fore-fathers forſook their native land, where they had a *goodly heritage*, and ſought a ſafe retreat in this weſtern world, a wilderneſs inhabited by ſavage beaſts and more ſavage men; though both were leſs ſavage than ſome of thoſe epiſcopal blood-thirſty tyrants from whoſe rage they fled. This is a cauſe of no leſs importance even to the preſent happineſs of human ſociety, than that of civil liberty, in oppoſition to arbitrary power. And here I beg leave to uſe the words of a truly catholic prelate of *the church of England* — "To "liberty and property, ſays he, I add the free exerciſe of "religion as neceſſary to the happineſs of a governed "ſociety: becauſe as there is no tyranny ſo odious to "God, as tyranny over the conſcience; ſo is there no "ſlavery ſo uneaſy and ignominious, as a forced religion, or "a worſhip impoſed upon — men by the fear or applica-

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" tion of outward inconveniencies : beſides that nothing " promotes the flouriſhing condition of a nation more " than the indulgence of this freedom to all whoſe prin- " ciples are not manifeſtly inconſiſtent with the publick " ſafety." Thus the biſhop of *Wincheſter*, the noted ſcourge of civil and eccleſiaſtical tyranny.

I ſhall now cloſe with a few words by way of application. And

1ſt LET us all *ſtand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt has made us free*; and not ſuffer ourſelves to be *intangled with any yoke of bondage.* If we have ſubmitted to the yoke hitherto, and inglorioufly ſubjected ourſelves to any human impoſitions in religious matters; it is better to throw off the yoke even now, than to let it gall us all our life-time: It is not yet too late to aſſert our liberty, and free ourſelves from an ignominous ſlavery to the dictates of men.

LET us take pains to find out the truth, and after we are ſetled in our judgment concerning any religious tenet or practice, adhere to it with conſtancy of mind, till convinced of our error in a rational way. Let us deſpiſe the frowns and cenſures of thoſe vain conceited men who ſet themſelves up for the oracles of truth and the ſtandard of orthodoxy; and then call their neighbours hard names — We have not only a right to think for ourſelves in matters of religion, but to act for ourſelves alſo. Nor has any man whatever, whether of a *civil* or *ſacred* Character, any authority to controul us, unleſs it be by the gentle methods of argument and perſwaſion. To Chriſt alone, the ſupreme and only head of the chriſtian church, and the final judge of mankind; to him alone we are accountable for not believing his doctrines, and obeying his commandments, as ſuch. And whoſoever attempts to reſtrain or controul us, takes it upon him to rule *another man's*

man's ſervant, forgetting that he alſo is *a man under authority*; and muſt hereafter ſtand or fall by a ſentence from the ſame mouth with ourſelves.

DID I ſay, we have a *right* to judge and act for ourſelves? I now add — it is our *indiſpenſible duty* to do it. This is a right which we cannot relinquiſh, or neglect to exerciſe, if we would, without being highly culpable; for it is abſolutely unalienable in its own nature. We may diſpoſe of our temporal ſubſtance if we pleaſe; but God and nature and the goſpel of Chriſt injoin it upon us a duty to maintain the right of private judgment, and to worſhip God according to our conſciences, as much as they injoin us to give an alms to the poor, to love God and our neighbour, and practiſe univerſal righteouſneſs: and we may as well talk of giving up our right to the *latter*, as the *former*. They are all *duties*, and not *rights* ſimply; duties equally founded in the reaſon of things; duties equally commanded by the ſame God; duties equally injoined by the ſame Lord; duties equally required in the ſame goſpel. And a neglect of the duty of private judgment may poſſibly be attended with worſe conſequences to ourſelves and others than the neglect of almoſt any other. For he that does not examine for himſelf what is true and right, acts intirely in the dark, and ſo may run into the moſt irregular and deſtructive practices that can be conceived of, juſt as his weak or wicked guides are pleaſed to prompt him. He is fit only for a tool to the devil and his emiſſaries: and may flatter himſelf that he is *doing God good ſervice*, while he is imbrueing his hands in the blood of the innocent, and perſecuting the church of Chriſt.

But

2ly. AND to conclude, while we are aſſerting our own liberty and chriſtian rights, let us be conſiſtent and uniform; and not attempt to incroach upon the rights of others.

others. *They* have the ſame right to judge for themſelves and to chuſe their own religion, with ourſelves. And nothing is more incongruous than for an advocate for liberty, to tyrannize over his neighbours. We have all liberty to think and act for ourſelves in things of a religious concern ; and we ought to be content with that, without deſiring a liberty to oppreſs and grieve others. However we have ſome ignorant railing zealots amongſt us, fired with a furious party ſpirit, who are not ſatisfyed that they enjoy their own liberty, but mourn that their neighbours enjoy the ſame, and that they have it not in their power to afflict them for their religious ſentiments. They groan under the righteous *act of toleration*, as much as our fathers groaned under the unrighteous one of *uniformity*. However, through mercy, we have but a few men of this ſtamp amongſt us ; and thoſe are ſuch ignorant and deſpicable creatures, that they are more proper objects of pity, than of anger. My brethren, God forbid that *we* ſhould diſcover any thing of this ſame unchriſtian temper ; or begrutch others the enjoyment of thoſe rights which we ourſelves eſteem ſo dear, ſacred and valuable. Let us, *as much as in us lies, live peaceably with all men* ; but ſuffer none to lord it over our conſciences. Let us avoid a contracted, cenſorious ſpirit in ourſelves, and pity and deſpiſe it in others. Let us be courteous and friendly to all men of what denomination ſoever they be ; and how much ſoever their religious principles may differ from our own. If we think them erroneous, let us not rail at them, but reaſon with them in the ſpirit of meekneſs. Let us uſe no methods but thoſe of ſober argument and kind perſwaſion, in order to bring men over to a belief and practice of *the truth as it is in Jeſus* : and let us ſcorn thoſe who are for uſing any other methods with us. God grant that how different ſoever our ſentiments are, we may be united in love and charity ; and that chriſtians of all perſwaſions, and

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all churches, may live and behave in ſuch a manner, as to meet at laſt above: and join the *general aſſembly and church of the firſt-born which are written in heaven. Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON V.

On the Love of God.

MATTHEW XXII. 37 —— 41.

JESUS *ſaid unto him, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.*
This is the firſt and great commandment.
And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.
On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

THAT which renders it a matter of the higheſt importance to examine with freedom into moral and religious ſubjects, is not ſo much the advantage ſimply of *knowing* what is *true* and *right*, as the neceſſity of this in order to true and right *action*. It is ſcarce of any importance to us to gain a ſpeculative knowledge of true religion, but as this has relation to practice; and may teach us what temper of mind towards our Creator, and one another, we ought to cultivate; and what an external conduct we ought to adorn our lives with, in order to anſwer the end of our being;

in order to our filling up our place in the creation, and acting our part well in the great *drama* of the world. This is the view which ought to accompany all our inquiries into religious ſubjects. If we are ſollicitous only about knowing what is true and right, and terminate our deſires in ſuch knowledge, we purſue as an end what ought to be looked upon only a means to ſomewhat farther and beyond, viz. ſuch a conduct as may render us acceptable to our creator, and lay the foundation for rational happineſs here and hereafter. Knowledge can hardly be ſaid to be valuable for its own ſake, but only as it may be improved to good and excellent purpoſes: Nor is it eventually advantageous to us, any farther than we conform ourſelves to truth and right in our behaviour.

For what end does the *marriner* ſtudy the art of *navigation?* Not, ſurely, for this only or chiefly, that he may pleaſe and amuſe himſelf with the *theory* of it: but rather, that he may be able to *ſteer his courſe aright* through the ocean, and arrive ſafe at length at the port for which he is bound. Without applying his knowledge in this way, all the advantage it will be to him, is that of being *ſhipwrecked with his eyes open*, while others run upon ruin *blindfold*, and purely through *ignorance*. — We alſo are marriners; bound to *another country*, to *another world*. We ſail at preſent upon a boiſterous ſtormy ocean, in which we are in danger of ſuffering ſhipwreck. For the moral world, as well as the natural, has its *rocks* and *whirlpools*; its *ſcylla* and *carybdis*, and a thouſand enchanting *ſirens*. To know the *middle* and *ſafe way*, will not ſecure us, unleſs we keep in it, and avoid the danger on either hand. And to be *caſtaways* through our own negligence, while we know the courſe we ſhould ſteer, inſtead of diminiſhing, will augment our ſorrow. Religious knowledge applyed to its true ends and purpoſes, is the only knowledge that can be finally profitable and gainful; for, to uſe the words of St. *James* with a little

little variation, *as the body without the ſpirit is dead, ſo* knowledge *without* practice, *is dead alſo*: And it is the voice of reaſon as well as of revelation, That *the ſervant that knows his Lord's will, and doth it not, ſhall be beaten with many ſtripes.* What, then, has *our Lord* declared to us to be his will? And what does he require of us? One of the moſt comprehenſive accounts of our duty towards our Maker, and each other, is contained in the words which I have choſen for the ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe. They are the words of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt to a perſon whom the hiſtorian ſtiles *a lawyer*, in anſwer to an important queſtion, but propoſed by *him*, perhaps, with no very good intention. The queſtion to be reſolved was this — *Which is the great commandment in the law?* And our Lord determines it in this manner — *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment. And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf. On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* In diſcourſing upon theſe words I ſhall inquire

I. Into the nature and obligation of the two duties here mentioned — *The love of God*, and of our *neighbour*.

II. In what ſenſe, and upon what account it is ſaid, that to love God, is the *firſt* and *great commandment*.

III. What our Lord intends by the aſſertion, That *on theſe two commandments*, viz. the love of God and of our neighbour, *hang all the law and the prophets*.

IV. And *laſtly*, I ſhall endeavour to ſhow, that theſe two commandments have the ſame *place* and *preheminence* under the *goſpel-diſpenſation*, which they had under the *legal*: Or, that *all the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt hangs on theſe*

theſe two commandments, in the ſame ſenſe in which *all the law and the prophets* did.

I. THEN, let us inquire diſtinctly into the nature and obligation of the two duties here mentioned; the firſt of which is expreſſed thus, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.*

WE know that in ſcripture language and indeed in common diſcourſe, it is uſual for one duty or virtue to ſtand for all the reſt. *A righteous, a godly, a merciful a juſt*, or *an upright man*, often ſignifies *a good man in general.* And ſo, when we are commanded to love or fear God, or to work righteouſneſs, the meaning is not that we ſhould practiſe only the particular duty mentioned, as diſtinguiſhed from others; but often, at leaſt, that we ſhould become good men in general, and *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameleſs.* And this is the ſenſe which is ſometimes put upon the precept now under conſideration. However it ſeems plain, that this cannot be the true intention of it. For were it to be underſtood in this latitude, as injoining obedience to the commandments in general, it would include in it the *love of our neighbour*, which is expreſly diſtinguiſhed, in this place, from the *love of God.* Here is plainly a compariſon made betwixt two commandments, one of which is ſaid to be *the firſt and great commandment*, and the other to be *like unto it.* This, therefore, which is ſtiled *the firſt*, muſt be altogether diſtinct from that with which it is compared. Love is, indeed, the duty injoined in both; but the object of the *firſt*, is *our Creator* only; of the latter, only *our fellow-creatures.* This precept, therefore, does not include any of the duties of the *ſecond table* of the moral law, as they are commonly called. The moſt it injoins, is, *all* the duties of the *firſt table*, as diſtinguiſhed from thoſe of the *ſecond.* But, if I miſtake not, this command ſtill admits, and requires

requires a farther *limitation.* It injoins certain diſpoſitions and affections of the *heart*, towards God, as diſtinguiſhed from all *external acts of devotion and religion*; ſuch as *praying*, *offering ſacrifices*, *faſting*, obſerving *ſabbaths* and *ordinances*, &c. The manner in which the precept is expreſſed, ſeems to ſhow, that the duty it injoins is wholly *internal* — *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart*; i. e. ſincerely and unfeignedly — *and with all thy ſoul* — in the exerciſe of thy underſtanding, and rational faculties — *and with all thy mind* — freely, voluntarily, without reluctance or conſtraint. Theſe expreſſions ſeem to relate wholly to the mind. And that which determines this to be the true intention of the command, is what we find in the parallel place in another *Evangeliſt*. St. *Mark* relates the ſtory of a perſon's coming to our Saviour with the ſame queſtion which is here anſwered; and the anſwer to it is in effect the ſame. Upon which the *Scribe* (as he is called in St. *Mark*) replied thus — *Maſter, thou haſt ſaid the truth; for there is one God; and to love him with all the heart — is more than* all whole burnt offerings and ſacrifices — From this reply of the *Scribe*, it appears, that in propoſing his queſtion juſt before, he had a particular eye to the *external* ſervices required under the Law, compared with an *inward* regard to God, and ſincere benevolence to mankind: And that he accordingly underſtood our Lord in his anſwer, as making a diſtinction and compariſon, not only betwixt the duties of the *firſt* and *ſecond table*; but alſo, betwixt the ſeveral duties of the *firſt table*; and preferring the *internal* love and reverence of God, *to all burnt offerings and ſacrifices*; and conſequently, *to all external acts of piety and devotion*, as injoined in the ceremonial law. This is plainly the ſenſe of the *Scribe*; and it is equally evident that our Lord approved his ſenſe: For it follows immediately in the next verſe — *And when Jeſus ſaw that he anſwered diſcretely, he ſaid unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.* I ſhall, therefore, take it for granted, or rather proved, That the precept

cept which our Lord calls the *firſt and great commandment*, is diſtinguiſhed not only from all the duties of the *ſecond table*, but likewiſe from many of the firſt; particularly, from all external acts of devotion; from all rites and ceremonies and legal inſtitutions; and in ſhort from all duties whatever, beſides thoſe internal ones of the *heart* and *affections*; and of which God is the *only* and the *immediate object*. The duty here required, is wholly a *ſpiritual ſacrifice*; and the *heart* is the only *altar* upon which it is to be *offered*. Accordingly, in the following diſcourſe, we ſhall have no concern with any thing beſides the inward ſentiments of the heart; the diſpoſitions and ſallies of the ſoul towards its Creator, the *Father of ſpirits*. But let none think I am going to inculcate *enthuſiaſm*, becauſe I ſpeak of the *religion* and *devotion* of the *heart*. I propoſe to ſpeak of nothing but what has its foundation in ſcripture, and the nature of things: Nor will any *enthuſiaſm* be incouraged, beſides that which *ſober reaſon* requires.

WHAT then is it to *love the Lord our God*, in the ſenſe of the text? Or wherein does this duty conſiſt? I anſwer in general, That it conſiſts in exerciſing thoſe internal regards towards our Maker, which the perfections of his nature, and our relation to him require. And here I ſhall not ſpend time to prove, but take it for granted, That God is infinite in *power*, *knowledge* and *goodneſs*;—That he is able to perform whatever he pleaſes;—That he knows univerſally what is wiſeſt and beſt;—And that the moral rectitude of his nature is ſuch, that his will and actions are always conformable to truth and right:—That as he created all things, ſo he conſtantly upholds them, and governs them with perfect wiſdom and equity, accommodating and attempering his laws to the *common good* of his creatures — That as he is the *father of all*, ſo his government is *paternal*, free from all unneceſſary rigor;—uniform and ſteady, in oppoſition to all capriciouſneſs and arbitrary proceedings;

And

And *finally*, in the words of the *Pſalmiſt*, That he *is good to all, and his tender mercies, over all his works.*

It is ſufficient to our preſent purpoſe, juſt to have hinted in this general way at the character and perfections of God: For it being ſuppoſed that he is really *ſuch a Being*, it will not, perhaps, be very difficult to point out the principal of thoſe movements of mind, and internal regards, which are due to him; and ſo to aſcertain the nature of the duty under conſideration. And I think the various things included in this important and comprehenſive duty of loving God, may not unfitly be reduced to the following heads—*Love, in a ſtrict reſtrained ſenſe—Gratitude—Deſire of the divine approbation, and delight in the conſciouſneſs of it—Truſt in, and dependence upon God—Abſolute reſignation of heart to his will*—And laſtly, *Joy in the conſideration of our filial relation to him.*

What I mentioned *firſt*, was the *love of God in the ſtrict reſtrained ſenſe of the word.* By this I do not intend thoſe flaſhy and rapturous ſallies of the heart towards God, which may proceed only from a fond conceit, that we are ſingled out to be the peculiar favourites of heaven. We may eaſily fall into an extaſy, and run mad in religious contemplation, without having any thing of that divine love which is due to the perfections of our Creator. The love of God is a ſteady, ſober, calm and rational thing, the reſult of thought, and conſideration—It is indeed a *paſſion*, but a paſſion excited by reaſon preſenting the proper object of it to the mind. Nor ought we to be ſo ſollicitous about avoiding one extreme, as to fall into the contrary. We ought not to run ſo far from *enthuſiaſm*, as to loſe ſight of real devotion; we ought not to be ſo fond of a *rational religion*, as to ſuppoſe that religion conſiſts wholly in cold dry ſpeculation, without having any concern with the *affections*. Real piety neceſſarily ſuppoſes, that the heart is touched, affected, warmed, inflamed: and not barely

that

that we have right ſpeculative notions concerning God. A religion conſiſting in nothing but a knowledge of God's attributes, and an external conduct agreeable to his laws, would be a lifeleſs inſipid thing: It would be neither a ſource of happineſs to ourſelves nor recommend us to the approbation of him, who requires us to *give him our heart.*

INDEED St. *John* ſays, That *this is the love of God, that we keep his Commandments.* But it is plain, both from the nature of the thing itſelf, and from the deſign of the apoſtle in this place, that his meaning is no more than this—That the *natural effect* or *conſequence* of love to God, is *obedience to his commandments*: And not ſtrictly ſpeaking, that keeping the commandments, is a proper definition of the love of God. Theſe are evidently two diſtinct things; as diſtinct as love and obedience to any other being or perſon; or as any two things whatever. And how cloſe a connection ſoever there may be betwixt them, they ought not to be confounded. It is evident at firſt view, that this command, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind,* carries in it ſomething altogether different from an injunction of *external obedience.* The precept relates to the heart and affections, as diſtinguiſhed even from the underſtanding, whereby we diſcern and contemplate the divine perfections; and much more diſtinct from all external actions of what kind ſoever. Let any one ſee whether the following paſſages in the writings of the *royal poet and prophet,* do not carry in them the warmeſt expreſſions of inward eſteem, approbation and love. *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is nothing upon earth that I deſire beſides thee. My fleſh and my heart faileth me; but God is the ſtrength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Like as the heart panteth after the water-brooks, ſo longeth my ſoul after thee, O God. My ſoul is athirſt for God; yea even for the living God.*

When

When ſhall I come and appear before him!—It is plain that this is the language not barely of *reaſon* ; but of *paſſion* and *fervour* and *emotion of ſpirit.* Nor can any tolerable account be given of theſe, and ſuch like expreſſions in the devotional parts of ſcripture, without ſuppoſing that the affections of thoſe who uttered them, were raiſed to a great degree of warmth ; and that they terminated in God himſelf, as their proper and ultimate object, without regard to any farther or future advantage : they terminated in him as their end, in much the ſame manner that our animal affections and appetites centre in their reſpective objects. Nor is there any thing that is abſurd or romantic in this ſuppoſition ; any thing that will not approve itſelf to our underſtandings upon the cloſeſt examination.

THERE is a natural diſtinction betwixt actions and characters, ſome being in themſelves morally good, and others evil. Mankind have faculties for diſcerning theſe moral differences : and what is in itſelf right and good, is alſo in itſelf amiable in the eye of every rational being : it is in itſelf *right* to approve and love what is right, and *wrong* to approve and love what is wrong. Our Creator, beſides endowing us with reaſon to diſtinguiſh betwixt moral good and evil, has moreover given us another faculty which is ſometimes called *a moral ſenſe* ; and which St. *Paul* ſpeaks of under the titles of *the law written in the heart*, and *the law of the mind*. By virtue of this faculty, moral good and evil, when they are objects to our minds affect us in a very different manner ; the firſt affording us pleaſure, the other pain and uneaſineſs : And this, as unavoidably as the eye is differently affected with regular and irregular figures in the body ; or the ear, with the moſt grateful harmony, and the moſt harſh and grating diſcord : I ſay *as unavoidably* ; but neither of them are abſolutely unavoidable. There are ſome who have no *ear* for *muſick*, and others who have no *eye* for *architecture*, *painting* or *ſtatuary*. And

ſo there are ſome, perhaps, who have little or no *taſte* in *morals*. However, as to the latter, this is not the natural ſtate of their minds; but proceeds from their abuſing and perverting *nature*. (And all our animal ſenſes may be viciated alſo.) But take a man who has not violated frequently the *natural law of his mind*; and he can no more approve of what is commonly called *malevolence*, *cruelty* and *injuſtice*, than a *ſkilful architect* can approve of the moſt *irregular* and *aukward* pile of building: And on the other hand, he can no more hate and nauſeate what appears to be *honeſt*, *generous and benevolent*, than the other can be diſpleaſed at the ſight of an edifice, all the parts of which are *adjuſted* by the exacteſt *rules* of *proportion*, and the whole brought to the greateſt *perfection of art*. What man for example, who is not become depraved to a great degree in his own moral character, can read the contrary characters of *Cataline* and *Socrates* with the ſame complacency? Can he that has any remains of virtue, help being fired with indignation at the baſeneſs and perfidy of the *former*; and with love, at the virtue and integrity of the *latter?* Does a man that lives by plunder; that ſwells his ſtores by rapine, and fattens on the blood of the innocent, appear as amiable as one, that as *Job* elegantly expreſſes it, is *eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame?* One whoſe benevolence is diffuſed to all about him? None can avoid looking upon the *former* as the proper object of diſpleaſure, and upon the *latter* as the proper object of love and complacency, although his own intereſt is no ways affected by the conduct of either.

But what relation, it may be aſked, has all this diſcourſe to do with the love of God? I anſwer, a very near relation: For God, according to the ſuppoſition mentioned above, is perfect in all thoſe moral qualities and excellencies which we eſteem amiable in mankind: and which if any man does not eſteem and admire and love, he is looked upon as a monſter, debaſed below humanity,

manity, and unworthy to be reckoned among rational creatures. Now if it be reaſonable to eſteem and love our fellow-men in proportion to their juſtice, integrity and benevolence, muſt not he who is perfect in all moral excellence be in proportion the proper object of thoſe ſame affections? The goodneſs of God ſo far tranſcends that of the beſt of his creatures, that our bleſſed Saviour has told us, *There is none good but one, that is God.* The moſt that any can pretend to without arrogating too much to themſelves, is a faint reſemblance of the divine perfections. And can it be reaſonable to love and admire the mere portrait of moral excellence, and to let the ſubſtance, the ſource and ſtandard of it, remain unregarded. If goodneſs in a limited degree be worthy the eſteem of all rational beings, ſhall not that goodneſs that is without bounds, and abſolutely perfect, be thought worthy to excite in all, a real inward eſteem alſo? an hearty and ſincere complacency? an ardent, inextinguiſhable love? *A love ſtrong as death? A love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown?* In this there is no *enthuſiaſm*: in this there is nothing unreaſonable and fanciful: For undoubtedly thoſe qualities which being found in a limited degree, are really amiable, do not ceaſe to be ſo, when they become infinite; but inſtead of this, become *infinitely* amiable.

WERE it poſſible for us to contemplate the divine perfections without conſidering *our own* relation to God; *our own* dependance upon him, and his providential care of *us*; could we conſider him only as exerciſing his moral perfections towards other beings with whom we have no concern, ſtill it would be rational to love and eſteem him. For theſe perfections are in themſelves amiable, and conſequently they are ſo to all beings who are capable of diſcerning them. And we find ourſelves in a manner neceſſitated to love thoſe virtuous characters which we meet with in hiſtory;—characters of men who lived in remote ages, and the diſtant parts of the globe;

globe; although our own intereſt neither has, nor can be, any ways affected by their virtue. And thus alſo the moral perfections of God demand our love, ſeparate from the conſideration of our own particular relation to him. But when we conſider him under the notion of being *our* Creator, *our* moral Governour, *our* Father, *our* Friend, *our* Patron; this brings the matter *home to ourſelves*, and tends ſtill farther to endear him to us.

And this naturally brings us to another of thoſe religious regards which we owe immediately to God: I mean *gratitude*. This is nearly allied to the former; but intirely diſtinct from it. The love of God, in the moſt proper ſenſe of it, is an inward eſteem, and delightful admiration of the divine perfections, without the conſideration of any good we have either received or expect from them. But gratitude has reſpect to ſomething paſt; 'tis a thankful ſenſe and recognition of certain benefits which we have actually received. And it is plain that if the moral attributes of God, are in themſelves a proper object of love, their being exerted in poſitive acts of goodneſs and beneficence to us, calls for the returns of gratitude. Ingratitude is always looked upon as an indication of a baſe, ſordid and degenerate mind: It is what we cannot avoid condemning in thoſe to whom we have ſhown favour in any inſtance: we expect, at leaſt, that they ſhould retain in their minds a ſenſe of our munificence. All the world are agreed that this is what every man owes to his neighbour who has proved a benefactor to him. Why then ſhould not the ſame temper of mind take place in us with relation to God? If we think ourſelves obliged to thank our fellow men for thoſe inconſiderable favours, which they are ſcarce more than the *inſtruments* of conveying to us, what degree of gratitude can be ſufficient for us to exerciſe towards our conſtant and *infinite Benefactor?* towards that Being to whom we are indebted for our exiſtence; for all the faculties of our minds and bodies? that Being who is the

the *original, voluntary* beſtower of all that is valuable and dear to us? that Being from whom deſcends *every good and every perfect gift?* And as we are *chriſtians*, I may add, that Being who *ſo loved the world as to give his only begotten ſon that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life? — What ſhall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul; and all that is within me praiſe his holy name. Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul, and forget not all his benefits.* He hath *redeemed thy life from deſtruction*: he hath *crowned thee with loving kindneſs and tender mercies.*

But to proceed — Another branch of that religious temper of mind which is implied in the love of God, is a *deſire of his approbation and delight in the conſciouſneſs or the proſpect of it.* We deſire to be thought favourably of, by mankind; and to be thought ſo by the wiſe and good, yields no ſmall ſatisfaction to ingenuous and virtuous minds. But as God is the only perfect judge of real merit, to gain his approbation ought to be the higheſt ambition of every reaſonable creature. We are apt to lay traps and ſnares to catch the fluttering applauſes of the multitude; and delight to be *hoſanna'd* by them. But are *they* the ſupreme judges of what is really worthy of applauſe? Is it reaſonable to be ſollicitous about the ſentiments of the world concerning us, and to take no thought about the approbation of the great *Inſpector* and *Cenſor* of that world whoſe eſteem we court? No man that has any juſt conceptions of God's perfections can be regardleſs with what eye he views his conduct upon that ſtage where his place of action is aſſigned him. God himſelf is a *ſpectator* in this great *theatre* of the univerſe. A deſire of his applauſe, therefore, and of the *honour that comes from him*, ſhould in a manner exclude all lower ambition from our breaſts. And the proſpect of it muſt afford the higheſt ſatisfaction to every virtuous man, without the conſideration of any reward conſequent thereupon. The approbation of a *perfect judge*, is itſelf a *reward.*

ward. Nor is there really any pious regard to the ſentence that God paſſes upon our behaviour, any farther than our hope and delight terminates in that ſentence itſelf. This is *divine ambition.* But to look forward to ſome conſequent advantage beſide and beyond this, is *religious ſelfiſhneſs.* However, even this is not to be condemned, although it does not ſtrictly fall under the notion of *piety.* Piety *reſpects God himſelf, and him alone.*

To proceed — *Truſt in God and dependance upon him* as our portion and happineſs, is a duty which his perfections, and our own weakneſs, requires we ſhould live in the conſtant exerciſe of. None of us need to be informed of the internal want and poverty of our nature: we all *feel* it in a greater or leſs degree. It is the ſenſe of this inſufficiency at *home*, that makes us rove *abroad* after ſome foreign ſupport. * We have commonly recourſe to diverſions and amuſements; to the company and converſation of our Friends, to *mammon*, and animal pleaſures. Upon things of this nature we lean for ſupport; upon theſe we depend for that ſedate happineſs and ſatisfaction, which our penurious nature craves. But they are found to be abſolutely inſufficient to anſwer this purpoſe. Our inborn thirſt of happineſs is not to be allayed with ſuch ſhallow draughts as theſe, *Vanity of vanities*, ſaid *Solomon*, *all is vanity and vexation of ſpirit*, after he had ſearched a long time for ſubſtantial happineſs in worldly poſſeſſions and enjoyments. The moſt that theſe things have it in their power to do, is to *intoxicate* us for a little while, and ſo to make us think ourſelves great and happy. But as ſoon as we grow *ſober*, and *come to ourſelves again*, the *fool's paradiſe*, and the *airy caſtles diſappear*: we find our wants remaining, and ſolliciting for ſomething elſe. The conſtant language of our hearts is — *who will ſhew us any good?* — Who will do the friendly office to point us to our happineſs? Now

* See the Biſhop of *Briſtol's* Serm. on the love of God.

whither

whither ſhall we go to find ſomething that may fill our minds, and afford us a ſincere, conſtant and uniform ſatisfaction? Is there no object that is *adequate* to our wants and capacities? none that may be firmly relied and depended on, as a certain ſource of quiet and happineſs? Doubtleſs there is; and indeed that Object *is not far from every one of us: for in God we live, and move and have our being.* His power, wiſdom and goodneſs, may be a prop to our tottering and deſponding ſpirits; and if we pleaſe we may enjoy preſent happineſs in relying upon the care of his providence. We may thus get rid of all our wants at once; of all our anxiety and ſollicitude about *what may be on the morrow.* He, without whom *a ſparrow cannot fall to the ground*; He that *opens his hand, and ſatisfieth the deſire of every living thing*; He that even *heareth the young ravens when they cry*; cannot fail to provide ſuitably for *us who are his offſpring. The very hairs of our head are all numbered by him*: And we may *caſt all our cares upon him*, as the apoſtle expreſſes it; *for he careth for us. — Behold the fowls of the air*, ſays our bleſſed Saviour; *for they ſow not, neither do they reap; nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? — Conſider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin: And yet I ſay unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of theſe — Therefore take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow ſhall take thought for the things of itſelf: ſufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Obedience to this command, underſtood with ſuch limitations as common ſenſe ſuggeſts, would diſburthen us of a thouſand fruitleſs cares, and be a ſource of conſtant ſerenity to our minds, in this various ſcene, this inconſtant ocean we are paſſing through. The conſideration of an univerſal kind providence preſiding over the world, is, to them that will give themſelves time to attend to it, a ground of continual peace, and compoſure of ſoul. All we need concern ourſelves about is to do our own duty: the reſt belongs

longs to God; and he will doubtleſs do his part well; and they that *put their truſt in him* will have no cauſe *to be aſhamed*; but find their expectations anſwered to the full. He that is conſcious of the integrity of his own heart, may have confidence towards God; and exult in the language of *David*, in hope of happineſs both here and hereafter — *God is my refuge and ſtrength, a very preſent help in trouble. Therefore will not I fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains thereof be carried into the midſt of ſea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled; though the mountains ſhake with the ſwelling thereof — There is a river, the ſtreams whereof ſhall make glad the city of God — Becauſe he is at my right hand, I ſhall not be moved — Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my fleſh alſo ſhall reſt in hope —*

NEAR akin to that truſt and confidence in God now mentioned, is *abſolute reſignation to his will in all caſes and circumſtances.* There are indeed ſome things which, in one ſenſe, will unavoidably give us uneaſineſs, ſuch as ſickneſs, the *loſs* of our *deceaſed friends*, and *ill uſage* from our *ſurviving ones*, and the like. It is in vain to attempt to throw off human nature ſo far as not to be in any meaſure moved with things of this kind. But it is our indiſpenſable duty to diſcharge our minds of all murmurings at providence; and to acquieſce patiently in the lot aſſigned us. Things could not, upon the whole, have been better ordered than they are, if the world be really under the government of a perfect Being. When we conſider that *known unto God are all his works from the beginning*; his whole ſcheme and plan of government; and that by the goodneſs of his nature, he is diſpoſed to order every event through the boundleſs univerſe, and through all periods of time, ſo that all ſhall *finally* concur, to promote the *common happineſs* of his creatures? what reaſon have we to be ſubmiſſive in all circumſtances; and to ſay with our bleſſed ſaviour, *not my will, but thine, be done*!

UPON

UPON this ſubject of reſignation to the will of God, I ſhall beg leave to uſe the words of an admirable writer — "The conſideration, ſays he, that the courſe "of things is unalterable, hath a tendency to quiet the "mind under it, to beget a ſubmiſſion of temper to it. "But when we can add, that this unalterable courſe is "appointed and continued by infinite wiſdom and good-"neſs; how abſolute ſhould be our ſubmiſſion, how in-"tire our truſt and dependance?"

"THIS would reconcile us to our condition; prevent "all the ſupernumerary troubles ariſing from imaginati-"on, diſtant fears, impatience; all uneaſineſs beſides that "which neceſſarily ariſes from the calamities themſelves "we may be under. How many of our cares ſhould "we by this means be diſburthened of? cares not pro-"perly our own, how apt ſoever they may be to intrude "upon us, and we to admit them; the anxieties of ex-"pectation, ſollicitude about ſucceſs and diſappoint-"ment, which in truth are none of our concern. How "open to every gratification would the mind be, which "was clear of theſe incumbrances?" Our reſignation to "the will of God, may be ſaid to be perfect, when our "will is loſt, and reſolved up into his; when we reſt in "his will as our end, as being in itſelf moſt juſt and right "and good. And where is the impoſſibility of ſuch an "affection to what is juſt and right and good, ſuch a "loyalty of heart to the governour of the univerſe, as "ſhall prevail over all finiſter indirect deſires of our "own? Neither is this at bottom any thing more than "faith and honeſty and fairneſs of mind; in a more en-"larged ſenſe indeed than thoſe words are commonly "uſed. And as in common caſes, fear and hope and "other paſſions are raiſed in us by their reſpective ob-"jects, ſo this ſubmiſſion of heart and ſoul and mind, "this religious reſignation, would be as naturally pro-"duced, by our having juſt conceptions of almighty "God, and a real ſenſe of his preſence with us. In how

"low a degree ſoever this temper uſually prevails a-
"mongſt men, yet it is a temper right in itſelf; It is
"what we owe to our Creator: It is particularly ſuitable
"to our mortal condition, and what we ſhould endeavour
"after for our own ſakes in our paſſage through ſuch a
"world as this; where is nothing upon which we can
"reſt or depend: nothing but what we are liable to be
"deceived or diſappointed in. Thus we might *acquaint*
"*ourſelves with God, and be at peace.* This is piety and
"religion in the ſtricteſt ſenſe, conſidered as an habit in
"the mind: An habitual ſenſe of God's preſence with
"us; being affected towards him as preſent, in the man-
"ner his ſuperiour nature requires from ſuch a creature as
"man: This is to *walk with God.*" Thus the Biſhop
"of *Briſtol.*

But to ſubmiſſion to the divine will, we may fitly add even *joy and triumph of heart*, in the conſideration of our relation to God. The ſuperintendency of divine providence, if conceived of in a right manner, is one of the moſt pleaſurable and delightful conſiderations that can enter into the mind of a reaſonable creature, ſenſible of his own weakneſs and various imperfections. Indeed, if inſtead of a wiſe and infinitely gracious Being, one whoſe kind regards are extended to all his intellectual creatures; and one who governs the world with a view at promoting the moral rectitude, and ſo of advancing the happineſs of his creatures and offſpring; I ſay, if inſtead of ſuch a Being as this, we, in our imaginations, place at the head of the univerſe, a capricious, humourſome and tyrannical Being; one who loves and hates at random, and has no uniform, conſiſtent, and benevolent deſign; we form a ſcheme of principles, more deſtructive of rational happineſs than that of *Atheiſm* itſelf. For any man had rather be left to the mercy of *atoms*, and *fate*, and *chance*, or any other *chimerical Deity*, than be ſubjected to the pleaſure of ſuch a monſter, as an all-knowing, infinitely powerful Being, deſtitute of a ſteady, uniform

principle

principle of juſtice and goodneſs; delighting himſelf in the exerciſe of a wanton, licentious omnipotence — But, whatever ſchemes of religion have been propagated, in which the ſupreme ruler of the univerſe is repreſented in ſuch a gloomy and formidable dreſs as this, they are equally inconſiſtent with the religion of nature, and the religion of Jeſus Chriſt. Theſe teach us to look upon God as tranſcending all his creatures in mercy and goodneſs, no leſs than in power and greatneſs. Nor ſhall we behave ourſelves as becomes our relation to him, unleſs we always think of him with inward joy and pleaſure. What can be more unreaſonable than for thoſe who in God have a Father and Friend and Patron; one who is tenderly concerned for their welfare, and does what he can conſiſtently with the rules of wiſdom, to promote their beſt intereſts; what is more unreaſonable than for ſuch, to entertain gloomy and melancholly thoughts; and indulge ſuperſtitious fears, and groundleſs ſuſpicions? Were God a malevolent Being; were he an unreaſonable Tyrant; were he an hard Maſter; were he an implacable and revengeful Being; inſtead of a merciful and faithful Creator; a compaſſionate Parent; a gentle Maſter, a righteous Judge; we might well think of him with horror and dread; and even wiſh a period put to his exiſtence. For whilſt ſuch a Being ſways the ſcepter of the univerſe, no one can be ſecure a moment; but had better, were it poſſible, vaniſh into nothing, than have his future welfare depend upon the precarious pleaſure of ſuch a Sovereign. Such a Being were unworthy of any love, truſt, confidence or reverence; and would be the proper object of dread and horror, and hatred to every rational creature. But God forbid that we ſhould conceive of him in this manner. While God is our Father; while we are the objects of his love and care; while he looks on all our involuntary failings with an eye of pity, *remembering we are duſt*, and even paſſes by our wilful ſins upon our ſhowing the tokens of contrition; while his liberal hand ſupplies our wants in this world;

and

and while he offers us eternal happineſs hereafter, upon the gracious terms of the goſpel; what is there in this *idea* of God to make us fearful and uneaſy? Does the idea of a Father carry any terror in it? Do we dread the thoughts of our gracious benefactor? Do we look upon our Father, as our executioner, as *Iſaac* looked upon *Abraham?* Do we tremble at being in his preſence? imagining that he inſpects our conduct with the ſagacious malice of an *Inquiſitor*; inſtead of the bowels of a parent? While the *Fool ſays in his heart, there is no God*, do we *wiſh* there was none? If ſo we are Fools alſo. The doctrine of God's Being and providence is the moſt delightful and elevated ſubject of contemplation, that can enter into the mind of man.* Upon the truth or falſhood of theſe great principles of natural and revealed religion, depends the juſt idea of the univerſe; and of our own ſcituation, buſineſs, end, and expectations in it. And the whole ſyſtem of nature immediately puts on a quite different face, if the notion of an over-ruling benevolent mind be excluded. The world, in that caſe, appears like a forlorn deſolate wilderneſs; nor can we have any ſecurity; or ſafe dependance upon any thing — We know not to what infinite diſorders and irregularities, the whole world may run the next moment; and how ſoon all rational beings may be involved in ruin and miſery — Thoughts that excite the moſt terrible apprehenſions in the mind of every conſiderate man — Such is the world without a providence — an helpleſs Orphan — deprived of its vital animating principle — the ſupport of the virtuous — the hope of the diſtreſſed — and a reſtraint upon unbridled luſt and violence — But once eſtabliſh the doctrine of a ſuperintending providence, and creation revives; it puts on its former chearful countenance. If the world be under the government of a perfect Being, from this conſideration naturally ſprings, peace, tranquility, joy and ſatisfaction to every conſide-

* See Mr. *Foſter's* Serm. on Providence.

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rate man — *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice — Let the multitude of the iſles be glad thereof. — Righteouſneſs and judgment are the habitation of his throne* — This is a conſideration, which inſtead of dejecting our minds, and filling us with gloomy fears, ought to put us upon anticipating that triumphant ſong of the *bleſſed* — *Rev.* xix. — *And I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, ſaying alleluia — Salvation and glory, and honour and power be unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments — Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him.*

THUS I have endeavoured to give ſome account of that religious temper of mind which I take to be injoined in that precept which our Lord calls *the firſt and great commandment.* The next thing to be conſidered, is the nature and obligation of the duty commonly called *the love of our neighbour.* But this muſt be left to another opportunity.

IF it be poſſible that any one ſhould doubt of our obligation to love God in the ſenſe above explained, let us reverſe the ſcene, and try whether we can approve a temper of mind *contrary* to this. Let us ſuppoſe the divine attributes and conduct to be the ſame with reſpect to mankind, as we have hitherto ſuppoſed them, and made the ground of our obligation to the duty we have been diſcourſing upon. But let us ſuppoſe that a people in ſome *remote part of the globe*, inſtead of making thoſe returns of love, gratitude, &c. to God, thought it their duty to *hate* his infinite perfections, — to *blaſpheme* their Creator for his goodneſs to them — to *dread* his approbation — to *court* his diſpleaſure — to be continually *ſuſpicious* of him — to be *diſcontented* at the methods of his providence, and to mourn when they conſidered their filial relation to him, and his paternal government over them — Could we approve of ſuch a ſcheme as this?

this? Could we think that thoſe who embraced it were in their right minds? Or ſhould we think that they were not barely deſtitute of what is called reaſon and common ſenſe, but had ſome principle directly contrary to it. — A ſort of anti-rational faculty? — Well then, there is no medium between theſe two, unleſs we ſuppoſe that God is not to be regarded by us in any manner at all; than which, nothing can be more abſurd.— If he be the object of any affections in the human conſtitution, it muſt either be of thoſe of love, eſteem, honour, reverence; or the contrary one's of hatred, reſentment, anger, contempt, and the like. But we at firſt ſight ſee the ſhocking abſurdity of the latter ſuppoſition; the former therefore muſt be true ——

WHEREFORE to conclude, Let us conſider of the relation which God ſtands in to us, and of our obligations to him; and give him the glory that is due unto his name — *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Juſt and true are all thy ways, O thou King of nations! Who ſhall not fear thee, and glorify thy name!* Who ſhall not admire thee, thou eternal, inexhauſtible fountain of all good! Who ſhall not love thee, thou ſovereign beauty! Thou great original of all perfection! *Bleſſing and glory and wiſdom and thankſgiving, and honour and power and might, be unto our God forever and ever,* through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

On the Love of our Neighbour.

MATTHEW XXII. 37 —— 41.

JESUS *ſaid unto him, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.*

This is the firſt and great commandment.

And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.

On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

IN the preceeding diſcourſe we inquired into the nature and obligation of the love of God. The love of our neighbour is to be the ſubject of the preſent. The precept injoining this duty, is thus expreſſed in the text — *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.* Now the general queſtion, What is implied in this precept, naturally reſolves itſelf into theſe three particulars and ſubordinate inquiries.

1ſt. WHO is here intended by our *neighbour?*

2ly. WHAT *the love* of our neighbour implies in it?

AND, *laſtly*, what is intended by our loving our neighbour *as ourſelves?* A reſolution of theſe three particular inquiries will give us a full idea of the nature and extent of the duty under conſideration.

1ſt. THEN, who is intended by our *neighbour?* I anſwer, primarily and ſtrictly, thoſe who dwell *near us*; with whom it is to be ſuppoſed we have a frequent intercourſe; — and ſo have more opportunities either to *ſerve* or *injure* them, than we have to ſerve or injure thoſe that are far ſeparated from us. But the term alſo includes all thoſe with whom we have any thing to do — all who come within the reach of our abilities, ſo that we can do them good either by communicating poſitive happineſs of any kind to them, or by removing the cauſes of their miſery. Any perſon with whom we have any kind of intercourſe, whether he be one of our kindred or not; whether he be an acquaintance or a ſtranger; whether he be a friend or an enemy; whether he profeſs the ſame religion with ourſelves, or a different one; whether he be in a private or a publick ſtation; whether he be our own countryman, or a foreigner; let him be who he will, he is our neighbour in the ſenſe of the text, when providence puts it in our power to relieve his wants, and render him happy. That this is the ſenſe in which our Lord uſes the word *neighbour*, appears by St. *Luke*'s account of what paſſed betwixt *him* and a certain *lawyer* upon this ſame ſubject. Our Lord had told him that if he *loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himſelf, he ſhould live.* Upon this the *lawyer* aſked the queſtion which we are now endeavouring to anſwer — *And who is my neighbour? Luke* x. 29. Upon this our Lord relates a ſtory concerning a *Jew* who fell into the mercileſs hands of robbers. He was found in

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the road by two travellers, a bigotted hard-hearted *prieſt*, and a *levite* of the ſame diſpoſition. Neither of them afforded the pitiable object any relief, although he were one of their own nation and religion. But when a *Samaritan*, a man of another country, and a different religion, a man who had *leſs orthodoxy* and *more charity*, than the other, found this unhappy ſtranger, he had compaſſion on him, and relieved him. *Which now*, ſays our Saviour, *of theſe three was neighbour unto him that fell among thieves. And he ſaid, he that ſhewed mercy on him: Then ſaid Jeſus unto him, go thou and do likewiſe.* Go thou, and act the ſame neighbourly part: Look upon thy ſelf to be a neighbour to every man, and every man a neighbour to thee, who has any wants and calamities to recommend him to thee. Think not that thou diſchargeſt the duty of loving thy neighbour, by returning the kind offices of thy friends; by doing good to thy acquaintance; to thy country-men; to thoſe of thine own ſect in religion; but extend thy friendſhip to all whom thou art capable of ſerving.

FROM this piece of hiſtory, or this *moral fable*, (call it which you pleaſe) it appears, in general, that the charity which is injoined in revelation, is infinitely more noble, generous and diſintereſted than the *love of our country*, as ſuch, ſo much extolled by ſome deiſtical writers: And than that *friendſhip* which is recommended by writers of the ſame ſtamp — A friendſhip confined to a particular knot of men, whom humour or intereſt, or perhaps only a ſimilitude of vices, has tied and united together. To be a friend in the uſual ſenſe of the word, is to act a kind part to ſome one, or more particular perſons; but to love our neighbour, in the ſenſe of ſcripture, is to love the world; and to be *that* to *all* with whom we have any concern, which friendſhip is to *one* or *two*.

LEST we ſhould take up a notion that the proper objects of our love were our friends, our kindred, thoſe of our own party, or our country only, our bleſſed ſaviour took care particularly to enjoin upon his diſciples the love of their *enemies*, after his own example, who died for us while we were *enemies in our minds by wicked works*; and after the example of *his God and our God*; *his Father and our Father, who maketh his ſun to riſe on the evil and on the good, and ſendeth rain on the juſt, and on the unjuſt.* Our *enemies* are included in the general term *neighbour*; but it was highly proper and neceſſary that *they* ſhould be particularly, and expreſly pointed out to the *Jews*, becauſe they were generally ſuch blind, narrow-hearted bigots, that they looked upon all the world beſides their own nation, to be the proper objects of their contempt and hatred. This national hardneſs and ſtingineſs of ſoul, was continually increaſed by the influence of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, who, like too many modern teachers and doctors, inſtead of inculcating the great duty of univerſal charity, expended their zeal upon frivolous matters; and laboured more abundantly to make the populace adore themſelves; and to raiſe their indignation againſt all ſuch as dared to ſay any thing againſt their *old traditions*, or *new whims, by which they made void the law of God.* And that which made it neceſſary for our Saviour particularly to recommend to his hearers the love of their enemies, makes it proper for every other preacher to do the ſame, where bigotry and a party ſpirit prevails; and would to God, that there were not enough of this wretched ſpirit to be ſeen in our own land, at the preſent day, to make the ſame thing neceſſary now!

HAVING thus conſidered the *object* and *extent* of the love recommended in the text; we proceed to inquire,

2ly. INTO the *nature* of the thing itſelf. What then is implied in the *love* of our neighbour? I anſwer, it is the

the ſame thing with benevolence, good-will, or charity; a diſpoſition to do good and communicate happineſs. The ſame word that is uſed in the text to expreſs that temper of mind which becomes us towards our Maker, is uſed alſo to expreſs the temper and diſpoſition of heart which is required towards our neighbour. Both are expreſſed by the word *love* — *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart* — *and thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.* However, although the words are the ſame, the things intended by them are very different; as different as the objects of this love. When it is referred to God, no one imagines it means benevolence, or wiſhing well, or doing good to our Creator; but eſteem, complacency, admiration, reverence, ſubmiſſion, and the like. The reaſon of the thing, conſidering God's independency, power and wiſdom and moral perfections, and our own relation to him, plainly points out theſe to be the things intended, when we are commanded to love *him.* And it is equally plain that when our neighbour is propoſed to us as the object of our love, it cannot intend that we ſhould pay him that ſame internal reverence, honour, reſignation, &c. which we pay to our Maker. This would be *idolatry* inſtead of *charity.* So far as our neighbours reſemble God, ſo far indeed they are proper objects of the ſame kind of internal regards which we owe to him: And it is doubtleſs our duty to eſteem, and reverence them in proportion to their real greatneſs and merit. For God requires us to *give honour to whom honour is due.* However, this is not what is primarily or principally intended by the love of our neighbour. This is a duty which we owe to all in common, with whom we have any concern; too many of whom have little or nothing in them that renders them the proper objects of delight, complacency, eſteem and reverence. Nor can they be all in common the object of any other paſſion beſides that of benevolence or good will: This, therefore, is what the precept in the text injoins upon us. And our bleſſed Saviour plainly leads us to this general idea of

of the duty, in his diſcourſe with the lawyer before referred to, *Luke* 10. When the *lawyer* aſked, who was intended by his neighbour whom he was to love as himſelf, our Lord told him the ſtory of the *Jew* who was neglected in his miſery by the *prieſt* and *levite*; and kindly relieved by the *ſchiſmatical Samaritan* — and then added, *Go thou, and do likewiſe.* This ſhows that the primary and moſt proper notion of the love of our neighbour, which he had juſt before recommended, is a kind and charitable diſpoſition. It alſo ſhows farther, that the love of our neighbour, as the word is uſed by our Saviour, is not reſtrained to the heart and affections, in the ſame manner with the love of God: but is uſed in ſuch a large complex ſenſe as to include benevolent *action* as well as benevolence of *mind.* — "Go thou, and *do likewiſe.*" As the natural, and perhaps unavoidable, conſequence of God's being good, is his doing to his creatures; ſo there is a cloſe connexion betwixt theſe, in all other beings. We cannot conceive of a man's being truly charitable in his heart towards his neighbour, without doing good to him alſo, when it is in his power, and the proper occaſions preſent for calling forth this internal principle into action. What a man really wills and wiſhes in his heart, he effects alſo, when it does not exceed his abilities. So that benevolent action will always be in proportion to the ſtrength of the benevolent principle, allowing for the different powers, talents, and opportunities for doing good, which take place in the world. This I take to be the intention of St. *John*, in his 1 Epiſ. chap. 3d. ver. 7. *Little children let no man deceive you: he that doth righteouſneſs, is righteous, even as he is righteous.* He that acts well, is really good to the degree that he acts well; and he doth righteouſneſs in proportion to the righteous principle in his heart: theſe things keep pace, and the one is always the meaſure and ſtandard of the other.

LOVE is, in its own nature, an active and vigorous principle. This godlike gueſt, does not lie dozing in that breaſt where it takes up its abode, and conceal itſelf from the obſervation of mankind, like eaſtern monarchs in their palaces. Its *light ſhines before men, and they ſee its good works.* It is conſtantly exerting itſelf for the benefit of thoſe we love: The charitable man *loves not in word and in tongue* only, *but indeed and in truth.* Charity contents not itſelf with good wiſhes; with kind ſpeeches, and a courtly addreſs; but does ſubſtantial acts of beneficence, according to the exigences of our neighbours, and our own abilities. It contents not itſelf, with ſaying to the naked *be ye clothed*; and to the hungry, *be ye filled*; but adminiſters to their neceſſities. Love is infinite and the methods of its acting various, and innumerable. It originates in the heart, and from thence points every way, like various lines drawn from the centre of a circle, or rays iſſuing from the ſun. It ſhines with its benign influence upon all that come in its way. It is *eyes to the blind*; *and feet to the lame*; it draws upon it the *bleſſing of him that is ready to periſh, and cauſes the widows heart to ſing for Joy.* It is inſtruction to the ignorant; and conſolation to the ſorrowful; it is a timely redreſs to the injured and oppreſſed; and liberty to the captive. *Charity ſuffereth long and is kind*; *charity envieth not*; *charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up, doth not behave itſelf unſeemly*; *ſeeketh not her own*; *is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil*; *rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*: *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

THE apoſtle deſcribes charity, or the love of our neighbour, as comprehending all theſe virtues in it: And very naturally; for they are plainly but ſo many different branches of the ſame tree. *Charity ſuffereth long* — We naturally bear a great while with thoſe whom we ſincerely love — It *is kind* — It is benign, courteous, obliging; and ſweetens our manners, purging away all roughneſs, moroſeneſs

moroſeneſs and aſperity — It *envieth not* — does not grieve and fret at the proſperity of others, but rejoices in their happineſs — *It vaunteth not itſelf* — It is not inſolent or aſſuming, but is meek and condeſcending to others — *It is not puffed up* — It does not ſwell a man with vain thoughts of his own goodneſs and importance, compared with others; but leads him to *think others better than himſelf* — It *doth not behave itſelf unſeemly* — It prevents men from all indecencies in behaviour; ſuch as may be ſhocking and offenſive to his neighbours; and leads him to ſuch a deportment of himſelf as may be agreable to thoſe with whom he converſes — *It ſeeketh not its own* — It is not ſelfiſh, but excites a perſon to conſult the benefit of others — *Is not eaſily provoked* — or rather is not *greatly provoked* (as the word ſignifies.) — It is not angry to an exceſs upon any occaſion, violently inraged, and beyond meaſure; but obſerves a mean, where there is real ground for reſentment and anger. *It thinketh no evil* — It puts the moſt favourable conſtruction upon the conduct of others; and is not apt to impute to them ill deſigns and intentions — *It rejoiceth not in iniquity* — It is not pleaſed and delighted with the vices and miſconduct of mankind; but pities and laments them — It *rejoiceth in the truth* — It is pleaſed to ſee truth and righteouſneſs prevail in the world, they being the foundation of happineſs — It *beareth all things* — or rather, it *covereth all things*, —— agreably to 1 *Pet.* iv. 8. *Charity ſhall cover the multitude of ſins.* — *It believeth all things* — It is not ſuſpicious that our neighbours deſign to deceive and impoſe upon us; but is prone to believe what they ſay, preſuming upon their honeſty and integrity. — It *hopeth all things* — It will not ſuffer, us to deſpair of our neighbour repentance and reformation, although he may have wandered far in the ways of error and ſin; but hopes he may ſtill be reclaimed — Once more — *Charity endureth all things* — It is patient and ſedate; not fretful and tumultuous; it bears calamities and injuries; it bears with the

the faults and follies that are to be ſeen in the world, ſo far as is conſiſtent with the love of truth and virtue and piety: It is a calm and unruffled ſelf-enjoyment; a compoſed temper of ſoul, amidſt all the tumults and diſorders of the world. Thus comprehenſive is the duty of charity, or the love of our neighbour, in the ſcripture ſenſe of it; neither indeed, have we yet carried it to its full extent. Charity, conſidered in its greateſt latitude, comprehends in it all moral and ſocial virtues. He that is a real lover of mankind will, from this ſimple uniform principle, practice all thoſe virtues upon which the good order and happineſs of the world depends: Benevolence naturally and neceſſarily leads to this; i. e. to the practice of every virtue without exception. For there is not any particular one that can be omitted, nor any vice that can be indulged, without detriment to the world. The connexion betwixt the practice of all moral virtues, and publick happineſs, is cloſe and intimate: Nor are thoſe more private virtues that fall under the denomination of *temperance*, exceptions to this general aſſertion. It would take us too long a time to ſhow how all particular virtues, (or if you pleaſe *chriſtian graces*) that reſpect either ourſelves or our neighbour, may be derived from this one ſource of benevolence: But St. *Paul*'s authority will be ſufficient to juſtify the aſſertion, without any farther proof. *He that loveth another*, ſaith the apoſtle, *hath fulfilled the law*: *For this, Thou ſhalt not commit adultery; thou ſhalt not ſteal; thou ſhalt not bear falſe witneſs; thou ſhalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this ſaying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* And for this reaſon the ſame apoſtle calls charity by that emphatical name — *The bond of perfectneſs*, Col. iii. 14 — The *tie* and *nexus*, the common ſource and fountain of all moral perfections and excellencies: From that they all flow, and into that they may all be reſolved again: As benevolence in the ſupreme Father

Father and Lord of all things compriſes in it all the moral perfections of God: And as that ſimple principle, under the direction of infinite wiſdom, exerting itſelf in a variety of ways, in order to accompliſh the greateſt poſſible good in the whole, receives the various denominations of *goodneſs*, *grace*, *mercy*, *forbearance*, *juſtice* &c. ſo all particular ſocial virtues, may be only the various *modifications* of charity, exerted into action.

When we are ſpeaking of the virtue of charity in mankind, it ſhould always be remembered that we are not ſpeaking of a blind impulſe or inſtinct; a ſort of mad — good nature, that diffuſes itſelf abroad without prudence, fore thought or diſcretion; but of the benevolence of rational beings towards their fellow-creatures; which ſuppoſes, that benevolence is always under the direction of reaſon, pointing out to it the ways in which it is to exert itſelf, and the channels in which it ought to flow. Simple benevolence, not directed by knowledge, would be only a *loving*, *kind* ſort of *phrenzy* or *diſtraction*, which it is probable might do as much hurt as good. For a being without reaſon to govern his actions by, would be as likely to do wrong as right; to make the object of his kindneſs miſerable, as happy. But he that is wiſe as well as benevolent, will obſerve thoſe methods of acting, which are the moſt conducive to happineſs; that is, he will uſe the moſt effectual *means* to bring about his *end*.

There is no conceiveable goodneſs or evil in the actions of an intelligent creature, but as they conduce to ſome good or bad end. And ſince happineſs, in a large ſenſe of the word, is the only good end, the only thing that is valuable for its own ſake, it follows that an action is ſo far good, and no farther, than it produces happineſs: And this is the general rule which we ought to govern ourſelves by in our intercourſe with the world. To do good is what we ſhould aim at. But then there are other

other particular, and ſubordinate rules of conduct, flowing from this general one, which ought to be the more *immediate regulators* of our actions, in order to our doing the greateſt good we are capable of; ſuch as adhering to *truth*, *juſtice*; doing good to a *benefactor* rather than to another; providing for our *own families* and *kindred* rather than for others; and the like: For there are certain peculiar ties and relations, which make it reaſonable to give the preference to ſome in our kind offices, rather than to others. And this is ſo far from being inconſiſtent with univerſal charity, that it is upon the whole moſt advantageous to the world. Our benevolence would be too vague, and diffuſe; it would be in danger of evaporating without doing much ſervice to any, had not the wiſe author of our nature by the conſtitution he has given us, and certain particular affections, pointed it to ſome *particular objects more eſpecially*. In general our kindred demand our firſt concern; our other friends and benefactors the next; thoſe of our neighbourhood the next — and ſo on to our country, our nation; and from our own nation, to all others. This ſeems to be the order which God and nature have pointed out to us; and if ſo, then to obſerve it, and to ariſe in our good-will by thoſe *gradations*, muſt certainly be the moſt conducive to the general happineſs of mankind; for the order eſtabliſhed by God can never thwart, or interfere with, the good of his creatures. To break in upon the *order of nature*, or to act out of our *proper ſphere*, can never iſſue in greater happineſs to ourſelves or others, than keeping ſtrictly to *both*. And the method of being ſerviceable to mankind, whatever our ſtation, and circumſtances in life are, is ordinarily plain enough to thoſe who have any real inclination to follow it. But I muſt haſten to the third and laſt inquiry under this head, viz.

3ly. WHAT is intended by our loving our neighbour *as ourſelves?*

It has been obſerved † by ſome, That this expreſſion is capable of three different ſenſes — It may intend that we ſhould love our neighbour with *as great a degree of intenſeneſs* as we do ourſelves: and be as ſollicitous about his happineſs as about our own. This would indeed be a glorious temper of mind. But it may be reaſonably queſtioned whether it is poſſible for mankind in this world, or perhaps in any other, to be ſo benevolent, as not to have a peculiar feeling for themſelves. And as the poſſibility of this may be queſtioned, it may, in the ſame degree, be queſtioned whether this is the true intention of the precept. For all God's commands are adapted to our ſtate, circumſtances and capacities. Again, the precept may intend that we ſhould have a love to our neighbour *of the ſame kind* with that which we bear to ourſelves: i. e. that as we are all naturally concerned for our own welfare, ſo we ſhould alſo have *a real concern*, in ſome degree for the welfare of others. But this interpretation ſeems to be as much too low and jejune, as that above mentioned was too ſublime and elevated. For a man may have a real love to mankind in this ſenſe, and yet be a wicked, and unjuſt man, by reaſon that his benevolence is not ſtrong enough to be a balance for his principle of ſelf-love. All men have doubtleſs ſome degree of real benevolence; but a regard to their own private good may be ſo ſtrong as to counter-act and defeat it; and ſo lead them habitually to the moſt cruel and inhuman practices.

It ſeems neceſſary, therefore, that we pitch upon ſome third way of interpreting the precept before us. And perhaps the ſenſe of it may be this — That we ſhould not barely love our neighbour; but that our love to him *bear ſome certain proportion* to our ſelf-love; that we love him to ſuch a degree, as ſhall prevent us from doing any injury to him for the ſake of private intereſt;

† See the Biſhop of *Briſtol's* ſermon on this ſubject.

that

that in all our intercourſe with him, we ſhould *do to him, as we would that he ſhould do to us.* More cannot be well intended in the precept; and it is certain that leſs cannot. And ſuch a love to our neighbour as this, does not only imply that we abſtain from all acts of injuſtice towards him; but alſo that we are active in ſerving him when he ſtands in need of our aſſiſtance; for certainly this is what we ſhould expect of him. It is impoſſible exactly to determine *how far* we ought to go in acts of beneficence to our neighbour; but certainly ſomething is juſtly expected of us, beſides *not injuring* him. I ſhall beg leave to uſe the words of the Biſhop of *Briſtol* upon this ſubject, who ſeems to prefer the laſt mentioned ſenſe of the words. "Both our nature and condition, ſays "he, require that each particular man ſhould make "particular proviſion for himſelf: And the inquiry "what proportion benevolence ſhould have to ſelf-"love, when brought down to practice, will be, "what is a competent care and proviſion for our-"ſelves. And how certain ſoever it be, that each man "muſt determine this for himſelf; and how ridiculous "ſoever it would be for any to attempt to determine "it for another; yet it is to be obſerved that the pro-"portion is real; and that a competent proviſion has a "bound; and that it cannot be all which we can poſ-"ſibly get, and keep within our graſp, without legal in-"juſtice. Mankind almoſt univerſally bring in vanity, "ſupplies for what is called a life of pleaſure, covetouſ-"neſs, or imaginary notions of ſuperiority over others, "to determine this queſtion: But every one who deſires "to act a proper part in ſociety, would do well to de-"termine how far any of them come in to determine it "in a way of moral conſideration. All that can be ſaid "is, ſuppoſing, what as the world goes is ſo much "to be ſuppoſed that 'tis ſcarce to be mentioned, that "perſons do not neglect what they really owe to them-"ſelves; the more of their care and thought, and of "their fortune they employ in doing good to their fel-

"low

" low creatures, the nearer they come up to the law of perfection, *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.*"

We have now done with the three inquiries which we propoſed to anſwer — Who is our *neighbour?* what is it *to love* our neighbour? what is it to love him *as ourſelves?* We ſhall conclude the preſent diſcourſe with a few words concerning our obligation to the duty, the nature of which we have been conſidering. And if it be aſked *why* we ſhould live in the exerciſe of benevolence, I anſwer

1ſt. No man wants, that any one ſhould point out the particular grounds of the obligation that others are under to love and aſſiſt *him.* Every man naturally and unavoidably expects, and thinks he has a right to expect, kind uſage from thoſe about him. But will any man be ſo vain as to imagine that himſelf is the only perſon in the world that has any title to ſuch treatment? Can he, if he tries, perſwade himſelf, that all are obliged to love and do good to him, according to *their* abilities, and *his own* wants; and yet that he is under obligation to none? No man can ſeriouſly believe this, 'till *the light that is in him is become darkneſs.* Let us deal fairly with ourſelves: Let the ſame reaſon, whatever it be, that ſatisfies us, that others ought not to injure us, but to be beneficent and humane to us, ſatisfy us alſo, that we ought not to be injurious to them, but ſtudious of their happineſs. Happineſs is what each man deſires for himſelf as a real good; and he cannot be ignorant that others deſire it alſo, and have a right to expect it upon the ſame terms with himſelf. Either no one has a right to expect kindneſs, candour and good will; or all men have the ſame. And then mutual benevolence, and an intercourſe of good offices, ought to take place in the world univerſally. — But

2ly. God has required us to be benevolent, and friendly to each other. He that commands us to love himſelf with all our heart, commands us alſo to love our neighbour as ourſelves. And the will or law of a perfect Being, a Being who is in all reſpects fit to be obeyed, is what conſtitutes obligation in the primary and moſt formal notion of obligation. We cannot properly be ſaid to be under obligation, but *to ſome Being*, who has a right to give us law; and the more perfect that right is, the ſtronger is our obligation. But

3ly. To inquire why we are obliged to be beneficent juſt and charitable, is to inquire why we are obliged to be morally good; a queſtion that ſeems to carry its own anſwer with it — To ſuppoſe there is ſuch a thing as moral goodneſs and excellence, is to ſuppoſe that all rational beings are under obligation to conform to the rules of it. It is a contradiction to ſuppoſe that any particular temper, or courſe of action is *right*, and yet that it may be right for us *to deviate* from it. It is eternally right to conform to what is right: Nor need we look out for any farther obligation after we are ſatisfied that a thing is really right: This of itſelf ſuppoſes we are under obligation to do it; and that we cannot do the contrary without acting a wrong and unreaſonable part.

4ly The nearer we conform to the great law of benevolence, the nearer we conform to the perfections of the Deity. God is infinite in goodneſs. In this the moral perfection of the divine nature conſiſts. And if this be what renders God perfect, it muſt in proportion render us perfect alſo. And ſo far as we fall ſhort of it, ſo far we fall ſhort of perfection.

5ly. The order and the common good of the world evidently depend upon the exerciſe of mutual benevolence. From what proceed the tumults and principal calamities that are daily ſeen in the world, but from a neglect of this

this duty, and from the indulgence of a narrow ſelfiſh ſpirit? Were men to *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of love and compaſſion*; did they feel for others as well as themſelves; we ſhould no more hear of ſtrife and debate betwixt private families; there would be no longer thoſe contentions and animoſities that diſturb the peace either of church or ſtate: We ſhould no longer hear of the tyranny and oppreſſion of princes; or the envy and rebellion of ſubjects; we ſhould hear no more of *wars and rumours of wars*; of fields drunk with human gore, and *garments rolled in blood*; we ſhould hear no more of cities ſtormed; countries laid deſolate; men devoured by their fellow-men; or carried into inglorious captivity and ſlavery; but all the world would be huſhed into peace, *every one ſitting ſecurely under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree.* It is ſelfiſhneſs, prevailing over charity and humanity, that has ſpread deſtruction and deſolation through the world; that has depopulated the earth; that has turned the whole ocean into a *red ſea*; and the whole world into *Golgotha* and *Aceldema, the place of a ſkull*, and a *field of blood.*

The conſtitution of the world is ſuch, that plenty, peace and happineſs can prevail no farther than a foundation is laid for them in mutual benevolence, and an exchange of good offices. Love is the ſpirit that cements mankind together; and preſerves that order and harmony amongſt them, which is requiſite in order to the general ſafety and welfare; juſt as the regular motions and harmony of the heavenly bodies depend upon their mutual gravitation towards each other: Let this catholic and univerſal principle be once deſtroyed, and confuſion, diſcord, and the cruſh of worlds inevitably follow: And diſorders ſimilar to theſe unavoidably ſucceed in the moral world, upon the neglect of thoſe ſocial duties that have their foundation in love.

It is this divine principle that makes a good king; a good ſubject; a good maſter, and a good ſervant. This is ſuch a temper of mind as would lead every man to fill up his own particular ſtation in life with honour to himſelf; and ſo as to contribute to the general happineſs of mankind; it would ſweeten the nauſeous draught of life, and make us all paſs the days of our pilgrimage in this world with pleaſure; it would ſpread joy through out the earth. How glorious would it be if that time ſhould come, that every man was ſure, that he ſaw *his friend* every time he ſaw *his neighbour!* Would men take as much pains to do good, as they do to afflict and grieve and devour one another, the ſociety of men on earth would reſemble that of angels in heaven: But as things generally are, there is ſo much ſtrife and envy, and malice, and revenge, that a good man is ſick of the world: And is ready to cry out with the prophet, *Oh that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away and be at reſt.* But

6ly. An argument for charity may be taken from ſelf-love. That which tends to publick good, tends to private good alſo. To ſuppoſe the contrary is a manifeſt contradiction. For *publick* happineſs is increaſed no farther than the happineſs of *individuals* is ſo. The temper of love is in itſelf, the temper of happineſs, and ſerene, ſelf-enjoyment: And if the world be under the government of a righteous and wiſe providence, thoſe muſt, in the final reſult of things, be found beſt to have conſulted their own intereſt, who have been the moſt induſtrious to advance the happineſs of others. Wherefore, let theſe conſiderations laid together excite us to put on the divine temper of love. That charity which reaſon dictates, is ſo far from being the love of any ſect or party of men, that it ought not to be confined even to the whole human ſpecies. It ought to extend to every order of beings that is capable of happineſs. There are none ſo high and ſo much above us, as not to have a juſt claim

to

to it; none ſo low and deſpicable as not to deſerve our kind regards. The reaſon why we are not commanded to extend our love to the angels, and all the glorious inhabitants of the other world, is not becauſe they are a different order of beings; but becauſe they are out of the reach of our abilities; becauſe their happineſs is not placed in our power, like that of our neighbour. And as to the lower animal world, it is as truly a tranſgreſſion of the laws of benevolence and humanity to put them to miſery out of mere wantonneſs, and when no good end can be anſwered by it, as it is groundleſly to afflict our fellow men. Nothing ought to be below our notice, that is not ſo low in the ſcale of being, as to be exempted from pain, and incapable of happineſs. The lower animals are not; and *Solomon* makes it one part of the character of *a righteous man*, that he *regardeth the life of his beaſt*. They are all, in a good ſenſe, *the offspring of God*: God is the common parent to us and them: And we may ſay, without a metaphor, even to the worm, *Thou art my ſiſter*. Although we may be apt to think that our great ſuperiority to the other inhabitants of this earth, ſets us above an obligation to regard their happineſs; yet God had a particular regard to them in the inſtitution of the *ſabbath*; he even *heareth the young ravens when they cry*; *and not a ſparrow falleth to the ground without him*. If we would avoid a narrow, ſelfiſh diſpoſition, we ſhould conſider the whole univerſe as one magnificent building, with different apartments for different inhabitants, all ſubjects of the ſame King, and children of the ſameFather,whoſe general law is benevolence and kindneſs. *Him* we ſhould conſider as ſitting upon *the circuit of heaven*, and ſaying with a loud voice to *all*, what St. *John* ſaid only to a *few* — *My children! Love one another*; *for love is of God*.

This earth, where mankind have their reſidence, bears but a ſmall proportion to the univerſe. And this earth is again divided into different countries and nations;

tions; theſe countries and nations, into different cities and towns; into diſtinct ſocieties and corporations and families. This is neceſſary and convenient; and every one ought to be principally concerned for the welfare of thoſe to whom he is the moſt nearly allied. But he ought not to let any *part* ingroſs *the whole* of his benevolence. As a man's belonging to a particular family, does not deſtroy his relation to the whole commonwealth of which he is a member; ſo his particular relation to one political or civil ſociety, does not deſtroy his relation to the greater ſociety of mankind in general; not this, his relation to the whole rational creation. He that ſeriouſly conſiders himſelf in this light, as a member and part of one ſtupendous whole, will find little need of any farther arguments to convince him of the folly of being ſelfiſh, and contracted: He will be aſhamed of any thing that looks like a *party ſpirit*: A vitious ſelf-love will naturally be weakened in him: Benevolence will ſpring up in his heart; it will diffuſe itſelf like light from the ſun; it will ſpread from kindred to a country; from a country to a kingdom; and from one kingdom to another, till it reach not only all the inhabitants of this little ſpot of ground called *the earth*, but till it graſp the univerſe; and then a man bears the neareſt reſemblance to that *one God and Father of all*, who *is good to all, and whoſe tender mercies are over all his works.*

SPECULATIONS of this kind may ſometimes be of ſervice to us, in order to open and enlarge our hearts: But our *proper buſineſs* lies chiefly much *nearer home.* It is our *neighbour* that we are more immediately concerned with; it is him that we are commanded to love as we do ourſelves; and if we comply with this precept, according to its true intention, we cannot be deficient in our kind regards to thoſe that are more remote from us. Benevolence and charity will be the general turn and bent of our mind; and will naturally be felt towards all beings when they preſent themſelves to our thoughts.

What connexion and dependence there may be of the various parts of the univerſe upon each other, we cannot tell; *our goodneſs*, perhaps, *may not extend to all*, ſo as to influence their happineſs. But this we are certain of, that the happineſs of mankind depends upon mutual kindneſs and charity. And this being the caſe, it is a call from God and nature, to improve all the powers and capacities we are endowed with, in doing good to thoſe about us. — God grant that we may all be inſpired with this divine principle of love, that ſo we may be *the children of our Father which is in heaven*; and the faithful followers of *Jeſus Chriſt*, who has ſaid, *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.*

SERMON

SERMON VII.

The Love of God, the firſt and great Commandment, &c.

MATTHEW XXII. 37 —— 41.

JESUS *ſaid unto him, Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind.*

This is the firſt and great commandment.

And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf.

On theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

HAVING, in two former diſcourſes, conſidered the nature and obligation of the two duties here mentioned, *viz.* The love of *God*, and of our *Neighbour*, I proceed now, in the *ſecond* place, to inquire,

II. IN what ſenſe, and upon what account, it is ſaid, That to love God, is the *firſt* and *great* commandment.

We may obſerve, that this aſſertion of our Lord contains an expreſs and poſitive anſwer to the queſtion propoſed juſt before by the *lawyer*. It ſeems that the *Jews* (as was obſerved in the firſt diſcourſe upon this ſubject) were not agreed amongſt themſelves which commandment in the law [of *Moſes*] was the greateſt, or moſt important. Some pitched upon *that* relating to *circumciſion*; others *that* concerning the obſervation of the *ſabbath*; and ſo on. Now it was a reſolution of this point, which the *lawyer*, in his query, deſired of our Lord. And conſequently, the ſenſe of our Lord's anſwer will be this — "In making a *compariſon* be- "twixt the various precepts of the *moſaic inſtitution*, "the *pre-eminence* ought to be given to that which "reſpects the love of God; this is the *principal*, the "moſt *important* and *fundamental* of all duties; and "which, therefore, demands your *chief* care and at- "tention."

This is the purport of our Lord's anſwer. Now the inquiry which naturally ariſes here, is, What is the *reaſon* and *ground* of this preference? Or, upon what account does our Lord ſtile this, the firſt and great commandment? The reaſon is too obvious to need mentioning, why the pre-eminence or firſt place ſhould be given to this commandment, had the competition been only betwixt the internal love and reverence of the one true God, and the *rituals* of religion ordained in the ceremonial law. But it appears that the compariſon is made betwixt all the commandments in general, *moral* as well as *ritual*. And that which may ſeem ſtrange to ſome, is, That the love of *God* ſhould be looked upon as of more importance than the love of our *neighbour*. As *God is not* externally *worſhipped of men's hands, as though he needed any thing*; ſo neither can our loving him *with all our heart*, be any advantage to him; he being abſolutely independent. But our righteouſneſs and charity may profit men like ourſelves: our neighbour may be really

really benefited by our love and good offices. And as we muſt ſuppoſe that the *end* of all God's commandments, muſt be the advancement of the happineſs of his creatures, and not his own, ſo one might poſſibly think that thoſe commandments ſhould be eſteemed the moſt important, and claim our primary regard, in which the good of mankind is the moſt immediately concerned, ſuch as juſtice, charity, and, in ſhort all thoſe particular duties which are comprehended in the general one of love towards our neighbour. It might, therefore have been expected, that our Lord's anſwer ſhould have run thus — *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf; this is the firſt and great commandment.* But we find, on the contrary, that he has aſſigned only the *ſecond* place to this duty, and reſerved the *firſt* for the love of God. Now if this ſhould appear a difficulty to any, as probably it does, the difficulty may, poſſibly be removed by the following conſiderations, which I ſhall ſcarce have more than time enough to mention.

1. If it be our duty to love God at all, this is the duty which is plainly *firſt* in the *order* of offices. Our obligation to our Creator is prior in the order of nature to our obligation to our fellow-men. This appears particularly from hence, That our obligation to love our neighbour ariſes principally from the will and command of God: but we could not have been under any obligation to comply with his will in this *particular inſtance*, had we not been under ſome antecedent obligation to him in general. It is the perfections of God that induce upon us an obligation to obey him at all. Our obligation, therefore, to acknowledge the divine perfections, to cultivate a proper regard to our Maker, or in the words of the text, to *love the Lord our God with all our heart*, is, in the nature of things, prior to all others: And upon this account it may be ſaid, that *this is the firſt and great commandment.* If, in our imaginations, we diveſt God of thoſe perfections, which at preſent we ſuppoſe him to be

be poſſeſſed of, our obligation to obey him in any inſtance vaniſhes of courſe. But ſuppoſe him infinitely wiſe, good and powerful, and our obligation to love, honour and obey him, takes place immediately. So that our obligation to God is the *firſt* which we are under; it is, indeed, that into which all others may be reſolved. There is no duty which we owe to our neighbour, conſidered as a *religious* duty, but what derives its obligatory force from the will and authority of God. And as the divine perfections are the original and ſole ground of all religious obligations in general, ſo to have a ſuitable internal love and eſteem of, and regard towards, thoſe perfections, is the primary and principal of all duties and obligations. But I ſhall explain myſelf farther upon this head, under a *ſecond* obſervation, *namely*,

2. THAT the whole of *religion*, in the largeſt ſenſe of the word, ought to be conſidered as *the ſervice of God*, the ſupreme Governour of the univerſe: and in this light it is uſually conſidered in ſcripture. Now 'tis apparent, that the *firſt* thing, not only in point of *order*, but of importance alſo, is to form juſt ſentiments concerning the Being whom we ſerve; to be ſuitably affected towards him; to cultivate thoſe regards of eſteem, love, reverence, &c. which the perfections of his nature, and his relation to us, demand. Religion muſt originate here; there can be really no religion, no ſervice, that God can look upon as done in obedience to him, but what proceeds from this principle of love to him; and ſuch a principle does, as it were, inſure our obedience to him in all other inſtances. *Loyalty of heart* to our earthly *ſovereign*; a proper ſenſe of our duty to him, in general, is the foundation of obedience to him in all particular inſtances. The more our hearts are attached to our *prince*, the better prepared, and, the more likely, are we, to yield a thorough and univerſal obedience to his laws. I ſpeak now of a temporal prince; but this holds equally with regard to God, the King of kings and Lord

Lord of lords. Piety, or the love of God is the firſt and principal thing in religion, as much as loyalty to our earthly ſovereign, is the firſt and principal thing in the character of a good *ſubject*. And this is, doubtleſs, the reaſon, why the *decalogue*, that ſummary of man's duty, begins with our immediate duty to our Creator. When the *law* was given at *mount Sinai*, it was uſhered in thus, *I am the Lord thy God*, &c. *Thou ſhalt have no other gods before me.* This injunction of loyalty, to the one true God prepared the way to, and uſhered in, all the other commandments. Nor was this order in delivering the law, *accidental*, or without any particular *deſign*. It would be prepoſterous for a legiſlator to promulge any particular laws to his ſubjects, without firſt aſſerting his own authority, and requiring his ſubjects to own, acknowledge and honour him as their prince, or lawgiver. This is the purport of the firſt commandment in the decalogue: it requires thoſe to whom it was given, to own, acknowledge and honour the only true God; or, in the words of my text, to *love the Lord their God with all their heart.* And there is ſomething analogous to the divine conduct in this particular, in the conduct of earthly princes, who, in the firſt place, require *an oath of allegiance* from their ſubjects, in order to make way for their laws to be cordially received and obeyed. This is a cuſtom which has prevailed pretty generally in the world; and it is plain that it anſwers good ends in government. Nor is it leſs proper in the divine government, than in human, that we ſhould be required in the firſt place, and as the ground-work, the ſum and ſubſtance of all, to have a ſuitable regard towards him, whoſe ſubjects we are; i. e. to honour and reſpect him as our prince. The general reaſon of this, is the ſame in both caſes, viz. the neceſſity of our acknowledging the legiſlator, in order to our obeying his laws. And this brings me to obſerve, in the *third* place,

3. THAT

3. THAT the love of God is the only ſure and ſteady principle of virtue and righteouſneſs in our conduct towards our fellow-men. The moral and ſocial virtues are, indeed, amiable in themſelves; worthy to be practiſed; and it would (ordinarily at leaſt) be the intereſt of mankind to practiſe them, even although there were no God at all. But conſidering the weakneſs of human reaſon, the ſtrength of human paſſion, and the force and variety of temptation; conſidering what men are in themſelves, and what a world they live in; it cannot well be ſuppoſed that they ſhould uniformly act a virtuous part, from thoſe conſiderations alone. Virtue is amiable, and excellent in itſelf: But the bulk of mankind are not formed to be ſo powerfully ſtruck with the beauty and amiableneſs of it, as to diſarm temptation, and cauſe them to adhere to truth and right at the expence of their preſent eaſe and pleaſure. To the conſideration of the *fitneſs* of righteouſneſs, and all other moral virtues; and the *uſual* tendency of them towards happineſs, it is neceſſary that the conſideration of a righteous Governour of the world ſhould be added; whoſe poſitive will and command it is, that we ſhould invariably practiſe thoſe virtues which are in themſelves good; and who will finally *render to every man according as his work ſhall be* — To exclude a God, and a righteous providence from the world, is (I will not ſay, wholly to break down the fence betwixt vice and virtue, and to make it wholly indifferent whether we practiſe the former or the latter; but it is) to deprive virtue of one of its greateſt ſupports and guards. And it is to be remembered, that not to love God, not to cultivate thoſe religious regards towards him, which the perfections of his nature demand, is to *exclude* him to all intents and purpoſes, as to any influence which the knowledge and belief of him, can have upon our behaviour. The acknowledging of a God can have no good effect upon our conduct any farther than our hearts are ſuitably affected towards him. So that there can be little or no

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real *virtue* without *piety*. If any thing puts men upon doing their duty towards their neighbour, and deters them from vice, when the eye of the world is not upon them, and when their temporal intereſt is forfeited thereby, it muſt be a ſenſe of the divine perfections upon their hearts; i. e. a principle of love to God, in the large ſenſe in which that duty was before explained. Without this he will be continually in danger of relapſing into vice, whenever a preſent advantage is to be gained thereby, notwithſtanding the beauty and amiableneſs of a contrary conduct. But let a man once have a ſuitable ſenſe of the Deity upon his mind; let him really *love the Lord his God with all his heart*, and this will be a conſtant principle of virtuous conduct in all conditions and circumſtances of life. It amounts to little leſs than a contradiction to ſuppoſe that a man ſhould really love God, and yet indulge himſelf in the practiſe of thoſe ſins which God has forbidden; and which he knows are contrary to the divine perfections. The connexion betwixt the love of God, and obedience to his commandments, is ſo cloſe and inſeparable, that St. *John* tells, That *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*: and again, *Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments — He that ſaith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him* — The love of our neighbour (which includes all moral virtues in it) neceſſarily flows from the love of God, according to the ſame apoſtle — *If any man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.*—Nor is this leſs evident from reaſon than revelation. The love of God is the love of the divine perfections; 'tis the love of truth, goodneſs, juſtice, holineſs, and all moral excellencies. And he that loves theſe perfections, cannot indulge himſelf in thoſe vices which are contrary to them: but will, of courſe, practice all the moral virtues in his own life. It is a common obſervation, *that ſimilitude begets love*; and it is equally true, *that love begets ſimilitude.* What we love and admire in others,

we imitate, as naturally as we love in others thoſe diſpoſitions and humours that prevail in ourſelves. So that if a man love God, who is poſſeſſed of all moral perfections, he muſt, of courſe be moulded into the ſame image himſelf; he will naturally conform his own temper and behaviour to the moral character of God, and *be perfect, even as his Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

From theſe conſiderations it follows, that although the ultimate deſign of all the divine commandments, were to bring us to a ſuitable temper and behaviour towards each other, in order to our mutual happineſs; yet ſtill, to *love the Lord our God with all our heart*, would be *the firſt and great commandment*; upon account of the influence which the performance of this duty muſt neceſſarily have upon our moral conduct towards our neighbour; and the impoſſibility of our adhering ſteadfaſtly to the practice of virtue without ſuch a principle of divine love. Where the love of God takes place, the love of mankind and all the virtues that are comprehended in it, muſt neceſſarily take place alſo: Nor can the latter take place to any good purpoſe or degree, where the former is wanting. The love of God is the fountain from whence the love of our neighbour flows: and to expect to find the latter in the breaſt where the former is not, is as vain as to expect to find a ſtream which has no fource from whence it is derived. All moral excellencies in mankind have their origin here, in a proper regard and diſpoſition of heart towards God: and this is ſufficient, of itſelf, to intitle this command to the place which our Lord has aſſigned it. But

4. And *laſtly* here, This may be ſaid to be *the firſt and great commandment*, becauſe the happineſs of good men in this world conſiſts principally in exerciſing thoſe religious regards which are intended by the love of God. The duty conſiſts in delight and complacency in God; in

in contemplating his perfections; in resignation of heart to his will; in trust and dependance upon him; and hope and confidence in his goodness. And he that is formed to such a divine and heavenly temper as this, has the temper of happiness. He has within him a secret spring of peace and consolation, that not only forbids him to be miserable, but also causes him to *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*. Without this principle of divine love, and trust in God, there can be but little happiness injoyed in such a world of confusion and disorder as this, where every thing is in a fluctuating condition; where nothing can be depended upon. God is the adequate, the only adequate, object of our affections; and our supreme felicity in this world, as well as in the next, consists in the *enjoyment* of him. So that had God consulted only our present happiness, he could not have commanded us to do any thing which has so great a tendency to promote it, and is so closely connected with it, as *loving him with all our heart*. This will, indeed, appear wild and fanciful to some men, who value themselves much upon their *reason*, but have no *parts* or *capacity* for devotion. However the happiness of those whose souls are formed to the love of God, the supreme and everlasting good, is not the less, because some men have no *taste* or *relish*, for the sublime and exalted pleasures of piety.

HAVING thus, briefly shown some of the grounds of that pre-eminence which our Lord gives to this commandment, I proceed

III. To inquire what our Lord intends by the assertion, that *on these two commandments*, viz. the love of God, and of our neighbour, *hang all the law and the prophets?* Now the full sense of this assertion may possibly be comprehended in the following particulars.

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1. UNDER the *Moſaic* inſtitution, and during the miniſtry of the *Jewiſh* prophets, the love of God and man, were the *principal* and *moſt important* duties; more excellent in themſelves, more acceptable to God, and more beneficial to mankind, than the moſt punctilious obſervation of the ceremonial parts of the law. The love of God, comprehending a ſincere regard to, and hearty complacence in, all the divine perfections; and the love of our neighbour, comprehending all moral, ſocial and relative virtues, were the *ſum* and *ſubſtance* of religion under the legal diſpenſation. This is plainly implied in the aſſertion, That *on theſe two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* Every thing was of little account when put in competition with theſe great and excellent duties. And this is plainly the light in which the prophets conſtantly taught the *Jews* to look upon the various precepts of the law. I ſhall have time to quote only two or three paſſages, where ſuch a pre-eminence is evidently given to the unalterable duties of inward piety, and a life of charity and holineſs. To this effect are the words of the prophet *Iſaiah*, chap. i. *To what purpoſes is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me, ſaith the Lord? — Bring no more vain oblations — your hands are full of blood. Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow.* So *Micah* vi. 5, and onwards—*Hear O my people! remember now what Balak king of Moab conſulted — wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? ſhall I give my firſt born for my tranſgreſſion; the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul? He hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* Theſe duties are the ſame with

with those in the text; and the same which our blessed Saviour stiled *the weightier matters of the law*, *Matt.* xxiii. 23. and with the omission of which, he upbraids the *Pharisees*, *Luke* xi. 42. *But woe unto you Pharisees; for ye tythe mint and rue and all manner of herbs; and pass over judgment and the love of God; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

2. The assertion before us may carry something more in it, than that the love of God and man, were the *most important* of any duties of the law — *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* — This may possibly intend, that these two general precepts, do in effect, and in some sense, comprehend all other duties in them, of what kind soever. — Not strictly, indeed; for then no comparison could properly be made betwixt them, and others — But as he that obeys them, he that has a real principle of love to God and man in his heart, will naturally be led to do his duty in every other instance — to worship God in such manner as he requires, and to discharge all the duties which he owes to himself, and to his neighbour, in his particular station. These two virtues, as it were, comprehend all others in them. For he that sincerely loves and honours God in his heart, cannot fail to perform all the external acts of piety which God has injoined, all the duties of the *first table*; and from the love of our neighbour naturally flow, all the duties of the *second*, all the duties which we owe to one another. So that to love God and our neighbour, is, in effect, to obey the whole law and the prophets; and to do all that God requires of us. And thus do *all the law and the prophets, hang on these two commandments.*

3. And *lastly*; In this position it may be implied, That the *end* and *design* of all positive institutions; of all precepts not strictly comprehended in these natural and unalterable duties of piety and charity, was to bring men to the practice of them. All the rituals of religion,

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as appointed under the law, had ſome reference to theſe eſſential duties; they were not injoined under the notion of having any natural and inherent excellence or goodneſs in them; but as means to bring men to a proper temper of mind towards their Maker, and one another; neither were they valuable or beneficial any farther than as they promoted this end, even ſincere piety, and a life of holineſs and charity. In theſe things conſiſted real religion; and every thing beſides, had no other relation to religion, but that of *means* to an *end*. The rituals of religion, though obſerved with the greateſt exactneſs, were rather an abomination, than a pleaſure, to the Lord, when they were not accompanied, or followed, by theſe natural and eſſential duties. Thus much is plainly implied in thoſe words of the prophet, Iſai. lxvi. 2 —— 5. — *To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite ſpirit, and trembleth at my word. He that killeth an ox, is as if he ſlew a man; he that ſacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered ſwine's blood; he that burneth incenſe, as if he bleſſed an idol: yea, they have choſen their own ways, and their ſoul delighteth in their abominations. I alſo will chuſe their deluſions, — becauſe when I called, none did anſwer; when I ſpake they did not hear; but they did evil before mine eyes, and choſe that in which I delighted not.*

THUS do *all the law and the prophets hang on theſe two commandments* — They are the moſt important duties of the law and the prophets—All duties and virtues naturally flow from them — And all the ceremonials of religion were deſigned as a means for promoting the practice of them. They were the ſum and ſubſtance, the *alpha* and *omega*, the beginning and end, of the *Jewiſh* religion.

SUCH was the religion of the *old teſtament*; and ſuch alſo is the religion of the *new*. Which brings me to the *fourth* and *laſt* thing propoſed, *namely*,

IV.

IV. To ſhow, that theſe two commandments have the ſame place and pre-eminence, under the *goſpel-diſpenſation*, which they had under the *legal*: Or, in other words, That *all the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt hangs on theſe two commandments*, in the ſame ſenſe that *all the law and the prophets did.*

Now, that I may avoid obſcurity, and obviate ſome objections which the ignorant, or the cavilling, might, perhaps, raiſe againſt this aſſertion, I ſhall briefly premiſe two or three things for the explanation of it, before I proceed to prove it.

FIRST then, it may be obſerved, That this aſſertion relates only to *duty*, or *practical religion*, as diſtinguiſhed from *faith* or *belief*. When our Saviour ſaid that *all the law and the prophets hang on theſe two commandments*, he ſpake of the *preceptive* part of the law, and the *duty* of *Jews*, who were ſuppoſed already to *believe* the law and the prophets, and to be fully convinced of their divine original. To ſuch perſons as theſe he ſays, that there were no commands of ſo much importance, as thoſe which related to the love of God, and of their neighbour. In theſe things conſiſted the ſum and ſubſtance of duty under the *Jewiſh* œconomy. Our Lord was not ſpeaking of what was the ſubſtance of *natural* religion, but of the *moſaic*, which was of divine inſtitution, and received as ſuch by the poſterity of *Abraham*. And accordingly, when it is now ſaid under the goſpel-diſpenſation, that *all the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt hangs on theſe two commandments, the love of God and man*, it is preſuppoſed that chriſtianity is believed; that Chriſt is received as *a teacher ſent from God*; as the *promiſed Meſſiah*; and that the doctrines of his *incarnation*, *death*, *reſurrection* and *aſcention* into heaven; and, in ſhort, all the doctrines delivered either by himſelf, or his inſpired apoſtles, are firmly believed. This being ſuppoſed, if the queſtion were aſked, *which is the great commandment in the goſpel?* the true anſwer

to

to it, (putting only the term *goſpel* inſtead of *law* and *prophets*) would be the ſame our Lord gives to the *lawyer* in the text — *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind. This is the firſt and great commandment: And the ſecond is like unto it, Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thy ſelf: on theſe two commandments hangs all the Goſpel.*

SECONDLY, It is not implied in this, that it is of no importance, whether *chriſtians* obey the *poſitive inſtitutions* of the goſpel or not, provided they practice the natural duties of piety and charity. As our Lord did not ſet aſide the rituals of religion under the law intirely by giving the preference to the love of God, and of mankind; ſo neither are they ſet aſide by thoſe who apply his aſſertion concerning the law and prophets, to the goſpel. The contrary is rather implied. And it is a truth obvious to common ſenſe, that all God's commandments, without exception, are to be obeyed; thoſe of a *ritual*, as well as thoſe of a *moral*, nature. But ſtill, as there were *the weightier matters of the law* under the *moſaic* diſpenſation, when a compariſon was made betwixt the ſeveral commandments of it; ſo there are *the weightier matters of the goſpel* alſo; and theſe are exactly the ſame under both diſpenſations.

LASTLY here: When I ſpeak of the ſubſtance of *chriſtian duty*, and the weightier matters of the goſpel, as conſiſting in the natural duties of piety and charity; or the love of God, and man; I would be ſuppoſed to intend, that theſe duties ſhould be performed upon *evangelical* principles. The duties in themſelves are really duties of *natural religion*; but being adopted into *chriſtianity*, they are to be performed upon *chriſtian principles*, and from *goſpel-motives*; with a proper *regard to*, and *dependance upon*, the *Mediator of this new covenant, who gave himſelf for us.*

WITH

WITH theſe explanations, I hope none will think the aſſertion ſtrange, That theſe two commands contain the ſum of chriſtian duty; and that they ought to have the ſame pre-eminence under the goſpel, which they had under the law.

THE main deſign of the chriſtian inſtitution is evidently to bring men to that moral purity of heart and life, which is compriſed in the love of God and of our neighbour. Neither the moſt exact compliance with the poſitive precepts of the goſpel, nor any kind or degree of faith, unaccompanied with a principle of ſincere piety and charity; nor, indeed, any thing elſe, where the love of God and man are wanting, can intitle us to the divine acceptance hereafter; or *make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the ſaints in light.* If we believe in Chriſt and his goſpel, ſo far it is well: but this does but lay the foundation for our doing that, upon which our ſalvation finally turns. A right faith is an excellent and valuable thing; but it is advantageous no farther than it *purifies the heart*, and *works by love*; no farther than it transforms our minds into the divine likeneſs; and leads us to live an holy and godly life. Thus the apoſtle *Peter* exhorts us, to *give all diligence*, and to *add to our faith, virtue*; [conſtancy, reſolution, fortitude] *and to virtue, knowledge*; *and to knowledge, temperance*; *and to temperance, patience*; *and to patience, godlineſs*; *and to godlineſs, brotherly kindneſs*; *and to brotherly kindneſs, charity. For*, ſays he, *if theſe things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye ſhall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. But he that lacketh theſe things is blind* —— 2 *Pet.* i. 5—It is practical religion, the love of God, and a life of righteouſneſs and charity, proceeding from faith in Chriſt and the goſpel, that denominates us good men and good chriſtians — Not wearing *the form of godlineſs* — Not the *belief* of any doctrines, however true, concerning the *atonement* of Chriſt — Not a lazy *recum-*

bency upon the righteouſneſs of another — Not any *enthuſiaſtic fervors* of ſpirit — Not a firm *perſwaſion* that we are *elected* of God, and that our *names are written in the book of life* — Some of the worſt men in the world, have as much *faith* as any in it — attend upon *ſermons* and *ſacraments* as often — *rely* as confidently — have as *warm frames* and *lively imaginations*— and are as fully *perſwaded* of their being *choſen to ſalvation.* But what does all this avail, if that *faith be without works?* if that *form of godlineſs* be without *the power?* if that *reliance* upon the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, be thought to ſuperſede *perſonal* and *inherent* holineſs? — if thoſe *fervors* of ſoul, are unattended by *divine love* and *charity?*—if thoſe *towring imaginations*, are but the *vagaries of a wild fancy?* — and that *perſwaſion* of their *election*, proceed from vanity only, and not from their having *given diligence to make their calling and election ſure?*

THE apoſtle *Paul*, in the iid chap. of his epiſtle to *Titus*, charges him to inculcate various moral and relative duties in his preaching; and then inforces this charge with an argument taken from the general deſign of the goſpel. — *For the grace of God*, ſays he, *has appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly and righteouſly and godly in this preſent world, looking for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity; and purify unto himſelf a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* Theſe words are plainly expreſſive of the main ſcope and intention of Chriſt's mediation, viz. the bringing of mankind to real holineſs of heart and manners; or, in other words, to the love of God and of our neighbour. In the next chapter this ſame apoſtle commands *Titus* to teach the importance and neceſſity of chriſtian obedience, and good works. *This is a faithful ſaying, ſays he, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God*

God might be careful to maintain gook works: theſe things are good and profitable unto men. In what does St. *James* place the ſubſtance of religion? *Pure religion and undefiled before God, even the Father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and widows in their affliction, and to keep a man's ſelf unſpotted from* the world. Does he not tell us that *the devils believe and tremble*? that *faith without works is dead*? that *faith cannot ſave us*? and *that by works a man is juſtified, and not by faith only*? The love of our neighbour is ſo eſſential, that St. *John* makes it a certain evidence of a man's being in a ſtate of favour with God; and the want of it as certain an evidence that our religion is of no value. *We know*, ſays he, *that we are paſſed from death to life, becauſe we love the brethren — But whoſo hath this world's good, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him.* St. *Paul* alſo makes the want of charity, a certain mark of a man's being *nothing* in *a religious eſtimation*, whatever faith, whatever gifts, whatever accompliſhments, he may be endowed with. *Though I ſpeak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as ſounding braſs and a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and underſtand all myſteries, and though I have all faith, ſo that I could remove mountains, and have not charity I am nothing. And though I beſtow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity it profiteth me nothing — Now abideth faith, hope, charity, theſe three; but the greateſt of theſe is charity.* It would be endleſs to quote all the paſſages to this purpoſe in the writings of the apoſtles.

Our Lord's preaching tended to the ſame point. What is his *ſermon upon the mount*, but a moral diſcourſe wherein the excellency and neceſſity of internal piety, and holineſs of life, is declared in the ſtrongeſt terms? Has he not made charity the diſtinguiſhing character of his

his true diſciples? — *Hereby ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another.* And *herein*, ſays he, *is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. So ſhall ye be my diſciples.* Has he not told us, that *not every one that ſaith unto him Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of his Father which is in heaven?* Has he not aſſured us, that *many will ſay unto him* in the laſt day, *Lord, Lord, have we not propheſied in thy name; and in thy name have caſt out devils; and in thy name have done many wonderful works? to whom he will then profeſs, that he never knew them, becauſe they wrought iniquity?* Has he not ſaid, *If ye keep my commandments, ye ſhall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Fathers commandments, and abide in his love — This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you?* If we look to the account which our Lord has given of the proceedings at the final judgment, when he *ſhall ſit upon the throne of his glory, all nations being gathered before him* to receive their doom; I ſay if we look to this account, what ſhall we find repreſented as the ground and reaſon, of the righteous being acquitted, but charity and good works? — *Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungred and ye gave me meat; thirſty, and ye gave me drink*, &c. And what on the other hand, is repreſented as the ground and reaſon of the condemnation of others, but the neglect of theſe ſame duties? — *Depart from me ye curſed; for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; thirſty, and ye gave me no drink*, &c. In ſhort, the whole tenor of our Lord's preaching was *moral*: he ſeldom inculcated any thing upon his hearers beſides piety towards God, and righteouſneſs and charity towards man: and all his diſcourſes were juſt as contrary to the *ſolifidian doctrines* which too many have given in to ſince, as *light* is to *darkneſs*, or *Chriſt* to *Belial*; nor can the former any more *have communion* together, than the latter. Our Lord inſiſted ſo much upon moral duties, that ſome of late, in order to vindicate their own unſcriptural

ſcriptural and irrational manner of preaching, have even been compelled to deny that he preached the *goſpel*, or deſigned to do it; alledging that his doctrines and manner of preaching were *legal*. The irreſiſtible conviction which theſe men have, that their own doctrines and diſcourſes are of a very different caſt and tenor from thoſe of our bleſſed Saviour, has put them upon making this wretched and impious evaſion. They *apologize* for themſelves by *condemning* their Lord and maſter. And rather than acknowledge, as they ought, that they do not preach the real goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, they deny that Jeſus Chriſt himſelf did. But notwithſtanding *they* aſſert our Lord's preaching was *legal* St. *John* the *Baptiſt* was plainly of a different opinion: for St. *John* the *Evangeliſt* informs us chap. i. that he *bare witneſs of him— ſaying — The* law *was given by* Moſes, *but* grace *and* truth *came by* Jeſus Chriſt. And our Lord himſelf, when the *Baptiſt* ſent to inquire of him who he was, told the meſſengers to tell *John*, among other things, that *the poor had the* goſpel *preached to them*; and this in order to ſatisfy the *Baptiſt*, that he was the true *Meſſiah*, and that *another* was not to be *looked for*. I muſt, therefore, beg leave ſtill to think, that our Lord really preached *his own goſpel*, although this may poſſibly be looked upon by ſome as an *heterodox* opinion; and a certain mark of my denying *the doctrines of grace*.

I hope it appears from what has been ſaid, that the love of God and of our neighbour; that ſincere piety of heart; and a righteous, holy and charitable life; are *the weightier matters of the goſpel*, as well as of *the law*. Indeed theſe are more evidently the ſubſtance of *chriſtian* duty, than of *jewiſh*. Under the goſpel, rituals are indeed of leſs account than they were under the law. It is not *on this mountain, or that*, that God is to be worſhipped; every place is a *chriſtian temple*; for *the Father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him*, as will *worſhip him in ſpirit and in truth*. Rituals were but *a yoke and a burthen, weak*

and

and beggarly elements even under the law. And they are much more ſo under the Goſpel, when compared to that *ſpiritual ſacrifice* which chriſtians are to offer to God. And as to charity, this is more peculiarly an *evangelical*, than a *legal* duty. For which reaſon it is that St. *John* ſtiles this *a new commandment, that we love one another.*

UPON the whole then, the caſe ſeems to ſtand thus— Although the chriſtian revelation brings us acquainted with many truths beſides thoſe which the light of nature ſuggeſts, or *Judaiſm* plainly taught; although it injoins us to do ſeveral things which would not have been obligatory without an explicit command; although it furniſhes us with a great variety of new and excellent motives to excite us to the practice of our duty in all its branches; and although chriſtianity cannot, for theſe reaſons, with any ſenſe or propriety, be ſaid to be the ſame with natural religion, or only a re-publication of the law of nature; yet the principal, the moſt important and fundamental duties required by chriſtianity are, nevertheleſs, the ſame which were injoined as ſuch under the legal diſpenſation; and the ſame which are dictated by the light of nature. They are natural moral duties, inforced with revealed and ſupernatural motives; and to be performed from principles peculiar to the goſpel. And, indeed, it is plain beyond diſpute, that the ſubſtance of true religion muſt neceſſarily be the ſame, not only under the *jewiſh* and *chriſtian* diſpenſations, but alſo, in all countries, to all rational creatures, in all parts of the univerſe, in all periods of time. Modes and ceremonies of religion may, indeed, be various as the circumſtances and condition of men; and God may afford different degrees of light and knowledge in different times and places: But the ſum of our duty reſults from the nature of God, our relation to him, and one another. And this muſt therefore be as immutable as God himſelf, *with whom is no variableneſs, neither ſhadow of turning.* As God is the ſame in all times and places; as mankind bear

bear the ſame general relation to him in all times and places; and as our relation to each other is always the ſame, except as to ſome trivial and merely circumſtantial difference; ſo the ſubſtance of human duty muſt neceſſarily be the ſame alſo in all times and places. There cannot be any other than circumſtantial differences in the duty, obligation and religion, of creatures who are the offspring of the ſame God; creatures endowed with the ſame common nature; and creatures bearing the ſame general relation to each other. Now that religion which muſt remain invariably the ſame, under every change of circumſtance, through all ages, in all places, and to all rational beings, conſiſts in the love and veneration of the ſupreme Father and Lord of the univerſe, and in the practice of righteouſneſs and charity. This is the religion which is common to earth and heaven: It is the religion of *angels* and *arch-angels* above, as well as of *ſaints* below: This was the religion of paradiſe before the apoſtacy of mankind: This was the religion of *Noah* before the flood: This was the religion of the *Patriarchs* afterwards: This was the religion of the *Iſraelites* in *Egypt* before the law: This was the religion which was ratified by God at mount *Sinai*: This was the religion of *the law and the prophets* to the day of the *Meſſiah*: This was the religion which *He* and his apoſtles principally inculcated upon mankind, under the goſpel diſpenſation: And this will be the religion, the employment and the happineſs of *the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect* hereafter in the kingdom of heaven; for the love of God, and *charity* ſhall *never fail*, although *whether there be prophecies, they ſhall fail*; *whether there be tongues, they ſhall ceaſe*; *and although, whether there be knowledge, it ſhall vaniſh away.*

THUS do theſe two duties claim the ſame place and pre-eminence under the evangelical diſpenſation which they had in the law and the prophets: *On theſe two commandments hangs all the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt.*

I

I have now done with the *four* particulars which I propoſed to diſcuſs when I firſt entered upon this ſubject. There are various moral reflections and inferences which naturally ariſe from what has been now diſcourſed; and ſo I muſt beg your patience a few minutes longer.

1. THEN, if the love of God and of our neighbour be the *weightier matters of the goſpel* as well as of *the law*, we are naturally led to bewail the folly, and unhappy condition of thoſe who, in a manner, leave theſe out of their religion. There are innumerable perſons even in the chriſtian world, who, neglecting that ſubſtantial religion which conſiſts in the practice of theſe ſublime and heavenly duties, employ all their zeal, care and diligence about things of little or no importance. Chriſtianity is principally an inſtitution of life and manners; deſigned to teach us how to be good men, and to ſhow us the neceſſity of becoming ſo. But there are multitudes who call themſelves chriſtians, who content themſelves with an idle, ſpeculative belief of certain notions and doctrines, without troubling themſelves about that *holineſs*, *without* which we are told, that *no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* They *know* their duty *ſo exactly*, and *believe* it *ſo firmly*, that they imagine they may well be excuſed from *doing* it. If they have but a great deal of faith, and rely ſtrongly upon the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, they think they cannot miſs of ſalvation, although, by their ſins, they daily *crucify the ſon of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame.* Some are pleaſing themſelves with a round of empty formalities, imagining that religion conſiſts chiefly in frequent faſtings, attending upon ſacraments, and worſhiping God with a great deal of outward pomp and ceremony. They forget that *God is a ſpirit*; and to be *worſhipped* chiefly *in ſpirit*: and love all kinds of ordinances much better than they love their neighbours. There are many, were they aſked, which was the firſt and great commandment, if they gave an anſwer agreable to their own practice, muſt

must say — Thou shalt tell beads devoutly; visit the sepulchres of antient saints; fall down before reliques; pay homage to painted canvas, to carved stones, and moulded clay, pray frequently to the mother of God; or the like: and if they thought at all of the love of God, and our neighbour, would assign them only that low place which our Lord gives to tything mint, anise and cummin. Others place religion chiefly in having frequent raptures, and strange transports of mechanical devotion; in which the less they exercise their reason, the better and more glorious it is. For 'till they have lost all *human understanding*, they think it impossible they should get a *divine one*. Thus they go on, raising themselves from one degree of religious phrenzy to another, till they run quite *divinely mad*; and then they imagine, that with St. *Paul*, they are *caught up into the third heaven*; that they *hear unspeakable words*; that they *see visions*, and have *a multitude of revelations given to them*. And the consequence of this is, that they *are lifted up above measure*. They then look down with contempt upon all *moral duties*, as being below such *spiritual men*. They are for a religion that consists in something more refined and sublime than the love of God and their neighbour; these are but barely rational and natural duties, and fit only for *carnal men*, or, at best, babes in grace. Nothing can hit the refined taste of these *Goliah's* in christianity, but what has some mysterious sublimity in it, and is quite remote from reason. What is plain and obvious is too low and vulgar for such great proficients in grace and spiritual knowledge. God forbid that I should say any thing to discourage a lively and warm devotion. But such enthusiastic flights as these, have no countenance from the gospel of Christ. And the almost invariable consequence of indulging them, is the neglect of solid, substantial religion; a rational love of God, of mankind, and the practice of moral virtue. When persons once get to gasping thus eagerly after immediate inspiration, they generally bewilder themselves,

ſelves, loſe ſight of common ſenſe, and neglect ſober religion for the ſake of having fermented ſpirits, and ſuperficial flaſhes of joy. They impute all their ravings and follies and wild imaginations to the ſpirit of God; and uſually think themſelves *converted*, when the poor, unhappy creatures are only *out of their wits.*

2. SINCE the ſubſtance of chriſtian duty conſiſts in the love of God and of our neighbour, and in the practice of morality, this ſhows us what a goſpel-miniſter's preaching ought chiefly to turn upon. When he is concerned with ſuch as are already chriſtians in *belief* and *ſpeculation*; that which he has to do ſtill is to bring them to be chriſtians in heart and behaviour—Not to dwell upon ſpeculative points — upon trifling diſtinctions, and upon metaphyſical niceties, which can only perplex his hearers, without bettering their minds and morals — But to excite them to put on a temper of mind and an outward converſation, which correſponds to their holy profeſſion; and, in the words of my text, to *love the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themſelves.* However, this is too plainly neglected by many. Their conſtant cry is — "Believe, believe" — "Come to Chriſt" — "Depend upon his righteouſneſs." As for holineſs and good works, they very rarely mention them; and when they do, it is rather with a deſign to undervalue them, and perſwade people that they are good for nothing, than to inforce them as the indiſpenſable condition of ſalvation. Nay, theſe things are not only ſpoken of very often as being perfectly uſeleſs, but even hazardous to the ſouls of men. Good God! that the deſign of thy goſpel ſhould be thus fruſtrated by thoſe whoſe immediate office it is, to inforce the holy precepts of it upon mankind! —

3. HENCE it follows, that thoſe people who are offended with moral diſcourſes, under the notion that they are not *evangelical*, are groſly ignorant of the very ſpirit

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and deſign of chriſtianity — They *know not what they ſay, nor whereof they affirm*; and *need to be taught what* are the rudiments and *firſt principles of the oracles of God.* Such ignorant, licentious perverters of the goſpel, the apoſtle ſpeaks of in his ſecond epiſtle to *Timothy*. *The time will come*, ſays he, *when they will not endure ſound doctrine. But after their own luſts ſhall they heap unto themſelves teachers, having itching ears; and they ſhall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables.* And, indeed, of all *fables* that ever were deviſed, there was never one that, either for ſillineſs or impiety, equalled this, that faith without works, without the love of God and man, and a life of holineſs, is ſufficient to bring us to heaven.

4. FROM what has been ſaid, we may ſee what thoſe doctrines of the goſpel are, which ought to be defended and propagated with the greateſt zeal, *viz.* thoſe which more immediately relate to practice; to the love of God and man — A zeal for all ſuch doctrines is *a zeal according to knowledge.* But it is apparent, that theſe have been but little regarded by many chriſtians, in compariſon of others which a man might diſbelieve without hurting his morals, or endangering his ſalvation. Thoſe things which have kept the chriſtian world in an eternal ferment; which have ſharpened the ſpirits of men; and ſet little angry bigots a ſnarling and growling at one another, are nice metaphyſical fooleries, ſcholaſtic diſtinctions without any difference, and mere words without a meaning. Theſe are the things, (or rather the *nothings*) which have been diſputed about, to the neglect of *the weightier matters of the goſpel*; and even to the deſtruction of all piety and brotherly love; of every thing becoming a man and a chriſtian. So hot and furious have many profeſſed chriſtians been in all ages, and ſo wrathful their contentions, about nothing, or mere trifles, that one unacquainted with the genius of their religion, would be apt to think it a very different thing from what it is.

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He might be apt to think that the maſter of theſe furious, railing, and burning diſputants, had left it in expreſs charge, as the diſtinguiſhing character of his diſciples, — not that they ſhould *be wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves* — not that they ſhould *love one another*; and practice mutual forbearance and condeſcention — and do unto all men as they would be done by — but that they ſhould be venemous and malicious as ſerpents — hate one another with all their hearts — do to every one as they would be willing to be done to by none — go together by the ears about words and ſounds — drag each other to goals and gibbets — to dungeons, and the flames — and conſign all over to hell-fire at laſt, who could not immediately pronounce their uncouth *ſhibboleths* — But O bleſſed Jeſus! thou Saviour of the world! is this for *thy diſciples to love one another as thou haſt loved them?* Or didſt thou mercifully *make peace* betwixt God and man *by the blood of thy croſs*, that men being at peace with God, might thus make war upon one another, and inhumanly ſhed each others blood! But —

5. And to conclude: ſuffer me to beſeech you all ſeriouſly to conſider of the nature, the great end and deſign of the goſpel; and principally to regard what is of the greateſt importance. Content not yourſelves with believing well — with being zealous either for, or againſt, any particular doctrines — with practiſing the rituals of religion — with being ſanguine in the vindication of any particular ſect or party, or in oppoſing any — Theſe things will not ſecure your ſalvation. 'Tis then and then only, that you will be the real diſciples of Chriſt, ſuch as he will own and reward at the laſt day, when your faith has its genuine influence upon your hearts and lives; when it inſpires you with the love of God, and of your neighbour; when it cauſes you to *break off your ſins by repentance, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord.* This moral purity of heart and life, is that religion which our bleſſed Saviour has taught; it is that religion which employed

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his lips; and which all his behaviour preached to the world, more eloquently and louder than a thouſand tongues. For God's ſake, for your own ſake, for the honour of the goſpel, and your profeſſion; *let no man deceive you with vain words. He that doth righteouſneſs*, and he only, *is righteous*. Let no man amuſe you with idle, impious ſtories, as if faith, and reliance upon Chriſt, were all that the goſpel made neceſſary in order to your ſalvation. As ſurely as the goſpel is a real revelation, ſo ſurely are theſe notions a mere dream—a fable—a fable wherein folly and wickedneſs ſeem to ſtrive for precedency — As ſure as there is a God in heaven, no man will go thither *to behold his glory*, and to enjoy the everlaſting pleaſures that are at his right hand, unleſs he forſakes his ſins, and becomes holy as God is holy. I conclude with thoſe words with which our bleſſed Saviour concluded his ſermon upon the *mount*, *Mat.* 7. 24 — 28. —— *whoſoever heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him unto a wiſe man which built his houſe upon a rock: And the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the wilds blew, and beat upon that houſe; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth theſe ſayings of mine, and doth them not, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh man which built his houſe upon the ſand: And the rain deſcended, and the floods came, and the wilds blew, and beat upon that houſe; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*

FINIS.

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